LIL LORIMER

BY THEO GIFT

Sapere aude
Fuimus
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LIL LORIMER.

LIL LORIMER.

A Novel.

By THEO GIFT,

AUTHOR OF

"PRETTY MISS BELLEW," "MAID ELLICE," "A MATTER OF FACT GIRL,"
"VISITED ON THE CHILDREN," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
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VOLUME II.

LIL LORIMER.

BOOK II.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER IV.

BY MOONLIGHT.

"Low sitting on the ground,
Musing full sadly in his sullein minde."—*Spenser.*

"Self-love, my liege, is not so vile a sin."—*Henry V.*, Act II. Scene iv.

"Shall quips, and sentences, and these paper bullets of the brain, awe a man from the career of his humour?"
Much Ado About Nothing, Act II. Scene iii.

"I DO wish I could persuade you to forgive me, Miss Hardy," said Max very miserably.

It was the evening of the second day of the young man's visit to Casa Blanca, and Lil was swaying to and fro in a rocking-chair set out in the verandah for the benefit of the night air.

In the *comedor* the men were still gathered affectionately round the wine and beer-bottles, their united voices,

amicable or argumentative, making themselves pretty distinctly audible even through clouds of tobacco-smoke and closed doors, on the one eternal topic "sheep," which forms the beginning and ending of every estanciero's conversation. I did know one *once* who had a few books (not about sheep) and read them, and could think and even talk about some other subject for a whole evening under strong encouragement; but he was the solitary exception that proves the rule, a "burning and a shining light" in the vast waste of ovine unintellectuality; and, if I remember rightly, a religious man and a Unitarian. Any way, I have always regarded that body with profound respect ever since.

Mrs. Logan was asleep on a sofa in the sala. You could just see the dim outlines of her figure, the face concealed under a cambric handkerchief, and the feet very conspicuous and glorious to behold in a pair of Lil's open-work stockings and rosetted shoes (the lady was of that frankly simple nature which is not above borrowed finery), but beyond a gently monotonous music of her own unconscious composing, she neither offered interruption nor contribution to the conversation of those who were only divided from her by a space of a few feet and an open doorway; and lulled by warmth and darkness, slumbered as peacefully as in her own bed.

Out in the verandah, however, where the moonbeams lay

white on the planked floor, and touched to silvery green the leaves of the few castor-oil plants and geraniums treasured by Lil, in one corner, all was cool, and still, and quiet; so cool from the pure, fresh breeze blowing across limitless leagues of unpeopled prairie, that the girl, swaying softly in her shadowy corner, was glad of the warmth afforded by the fleecy shawl she had thrown round her shoulders before coming out.

Outside, on trampled ground and waving grass, on bush and hummock, and the long, gently-swelling undulations of the wide pasture lands beyond, the moonlight rested like a thin whitish sheet, against which the rounded tops of the line of willows down by the *arroyo* looked by contrast as though carven out of ebony; while high above both, the full ringed orb of night hung like a silver lamp in a sky of molten sapphire. So still was the scene and hour that the sharp croak of the congregations of frogs down by the river's bank could be distinctly heard, though softened by distance to an almost musical sound; while, mellowed by the same soothing influence, such more familiar camp noises as the tinkle of a guitar, broken every now and then by a low monotonous chant from one of the *peons'* ranchos, the bark of a dog, or burst of laughter from the servants' quarters at the rear of the house; even the plaintive "Ba-a-a" echoed and answered from one woolly-coated and wakeful beastie, couched unseen

among the hillocks, to another, fell upon the ears accustomed to them with sufficient homely familiarity to rather add to, than take from, the pervading peace and restfulness of the surroundings.

Max Lorimer had come out from the *comedor* rather suddenly, shutting the door behind him, and flinging himself down in a half-sitting, half-reclining posture on the verandah, his back against one of the rough wooden supports, his feet resting on the dewy ground without. He did not say anything for a minute or so, neither did Lil; but some slight movement of hers, as though she were about to rise, made him turn his handsome head, glistening in the moonbeams like burnished bronze, towards her, as he uttered the words we have recorded. Lil answered them with extreme coldness.

"I don't understand you," she said, briefly.

"Oh yes, you do," said Max, leaning his elbow on the floor and supporting his chin in the palm of his hand, so that he could look up through the shadows to her face. "You understand me quite well, and you are awfully hard to me, Miss Hardy. You judge and accuse me of a hundred crimes which I wouldn't have dreamt of committing; and all the time I'm feeling guilty and miserable enough about the one error I did fall into, and ask nothing better than to confess it frankly to you, and ask your forgiveness."

Lil's pale face flushed slightly. Mr. Lorimer had one of those mellow, pleasant voices, seldom heard except among the upper classes, and which most women find irresistibly winning, especially when it has a coaxing ring in it; but some angry feeling seemed to rise in her, and harden her, as he said: the sister feeling of that he had roused when he told her under the willow trees how pretty he thought her; and she asked him as coldly as before:

"What is the 'one crime' you wish to confess, Mr. Lorimer? Your making me the subject of an impertinent bet among a lot of hard-living, hard-drinking men like those in there; or the way you were discussing me among them yesterday morning, even after you had seen me and—and must have known——"

"Known what?" he said eagerly, and leaning a little nearer to her. It was always much better to him that a woman—a pretty woman especially—should be angry with him, rather than simply indifferent; and that Lil had got angry in speaking was sufficiently manifest by the sudden tremble in her voice, and deepened crimson on her cheeks.

"I was going to say that I was vain enough to suppose you would *see* I was a lady; and men do not generally talk of ladies—young ones especially—in the way that—that——"

"In other words, you paid *me* the compliment of thinking

me a gentleman, and you accuse me of not acting like one!" Lorimer broke in hotly. "Miss Hardy, please listen to me In common justice you ought to do so. I did make a bet about you; I own it. That was the one sin I have been guilty of, unless you include my thoughtless compliment to you by the river; but the bet was before I had ever seen you or knew you; and I got led into it by a bit of thoughtless chaff. It happened in this way. I was staying at Nicholson's. I had a note of introduction to him, from a man in Buenos Ayres, where I first landed; and the other day a fellow came over from this place, and brought a message from Mr. Logan, to the effect that he heard Nicholson had got his shearing over early, that he was very late with it here, and short of hands; and that if Logan could spare him two or three, and at the same time send him over some colts they had been in treaty about, he should be immensely obliged. Nicholson said he'd half a mind to go himself, and take two of his *pay*—what is it you call shepherds and labouring men here?"

"*Peons?*"

"Yes, that's it, pay—oans. Sounds like a bad attempt at the French for peacocks, doesn't it? Well, then he asked me if I cared to come too, as I wanted to see everything there was to see in estancia life, and this was a larger place than his. I said I should like it immensely; but I could hardly go

without an invitation, especially as the new-comer had mentioned a *Mrs.* Logan; on which Nicholson told me that no one waited for invitations in these parts, and that as for Mrs. Logan, she was only too glad of the chance of a——I mean," said Max, his gentlemanly instincts leading him to check himself suddenly,—"that she was always hospitable enough to be glad to welcome a visitor from the old country. I said I had hardly seen an Englishwoman since I landed, so it would be just as pleasant to me, and I believe I added something stupid about wishing it were possible to see a pretty English face again, after your sallow Spaniards and half-breeds, whom romancists call so lovely, and I think hideous. Anyhow, that was how your name came up. They began boasting of a native born beauty, staying at Logan's, who would put to shame any English, Scotch, or Irish one I had ever seen, and——"

"Yes, yes, I know—" Lil broke in a little impatiently. "When men with nothing to do get together, they always talk a great deal of nonsense; but there is no need for you to repeat it to me."

"Thanks. I dare say *I* talked a good deal of nonsense. In fact, I know now that I did; and they (very rightly) put me down as disgustingly bumptious, and conceited. Anyway, that was what brought on the bet. They offered to lay

me twenty-five to five in dollars, that the beauty I would see here, would be quite equal to any I had ever seen in England or elsewhere; and—and—well, I took it. Of course I have lost, *cela va sans dire;* but that being the first punishment for my sin of incredulity, I——"

"Of course!" said Lil scornfully. "Mr. Lorimer, I thought I said you need not go on about that now. And you are telling me of bets laid by other men. I do not think you are very frank, after all. That was not the one *you* made: the——"

"I thought you told me not to repeat *all* the nonsense to you," Max interrupted angrily; but Lil had the satisfaction of seeing that he coloured and looked embarrassed, and she would not spare him. "Well—if you will have it, I did bet that if you were as pretty as an English girl, you would be as—as kind as a South American one. There wasn't much harm in that, after all. The girls over here *are* awfully kind and nice to a fellow. I've found them so, at any rate, and it's very jolly of them, of course; and—and I'm sure all that ogling and fan business is awfully pretty, and I myself hate stuck-up people and puritanism." Max went on bungling worse and worse, and getting deeper into the mud in his efforts at extricating himself with each word. "And when one of the men got up and said you thought no more of

snubbing any man's head off than if you were a duchess—(I dare say you had snubbed *him*, he was a vulgar little cad)—I answered him on the spur of the moment, that I didn't believe you'd snub me; and—and—that I thought—I hoped—well, I suppose I did offer to bet that we—that is, you—I mean you and I, you know—would be on the friendliest terms before a couple of hours were out. I—'pon my honour, I really thought I was defending you; that is, you know, I *like* women who are friendly, and—and all that sort of thing. I—Miss Hardy, look here! I see what you think. You fancy you understand it all now; and yet in one way, I don't believe you understand it at all. How should you? You don't hear men's talk generally; and you never ought to have heard this—any of it. It wasn't meant for you. It was just the idlest chaff and nonsense, and—and I do think it's hard—indeed, I don't believe a fellow was ever put in such a position before, as to be forced to tell a young lady, almost a stranger to him, every idle word said by him and a lot of others, in a private gossip over their pipes and grog."

"I suppose it is hard," said Lil calmly, and not at all moved by the mingled indignation and distress of her penitent; "but then, you know, it is harder for the young lady—almost a stranger to you, as you say—to be made the subject of such chaff and gossip at all; and you are not so

much to be pitied as she; for if you lost one bet, as you complain—which I do not think you need have done—I hear," holding her head very high, and speaking with cold contempt out of the folds of her fleecy shawl—"that you claim (by what right you best know) to have won the second and larger one!"

"I have done nothing of the sort," cried Max, too excited to remain seated, for he sprang up and began to pace the verandah with hasty strides. "By sheer accident I happened to meet you first; and I suppose I let my delight at such good luck carry me away, and that I deserved a snubbing. Anyway, you *did* snub me—down to the ground—and sent me off about my business. That was bad enough for me, in all conscience; but it was worse when I got to the house; for what must Nicholson do before we had been ten minutes out here, but tell Logan and his wife all about the absurd bets (confoundedly ungentlemanly I think it was of him!) —and begin chaffing me about your non-appearance. I didn't say anything at first. Perhaps you'll tell me I ought to have owned I had lost my bet, and that would have ended the matter; but a man doesn't like to post himself up for ridicule before a lot of strangers; more especially as the other men had come in by then; and they all set on me, and began chaffing me about you, and wishing you would come in and

correct my ideas about South American girls, till at last I couldn't stand it; and just said quietly that you wouldn't be long: you had only gone back to your willow tree for something you left there after showing me the way up to the house; and then I told Nicholson the beauty wager was his beyond dispute, and I should be glad to pay it him as soon as he liked for the sake of such a pleasant five minutes as I had enjoyed down in the wood there.

"That was all: every word, I swear it; and if it made them think that something more than the mere sight of you had made the five minutes pleasant to me, that was their look out. It may have been wrong of me not to disabuse them; but if you were a man, I think you'd have found the temptation to hold your tongue natural enough. Of course I knew you would be in in a moment, and that then they would see for themselves *how* friendly (!) we were; but if you were a man——"

"But I don't want to be a man—for that!" cried Lil, her blue eyes laughing out irrepressibly at the half-angry, half-woe-begone iteration of the words as her companion stopped his impatient walk and looked at her appealingly. "I—I think the temptation would have been rather strong even for a woman; for me at any rate."

Max Lorimer looked at her in surprise. He did not

understand her, and it was difficult to see her face in the dusky corner where she sat.

"Do you?" he said. "Then—then why," indignation beginning to stir again in his voice, "are you so very angry with me?"

"I don't think I am so *very* angry now," said Lil, smiling, "though you were wrong, and you deserved to be punished for making the bet at all. You should not talk of girls in that way here. I dare say in every country men say a great many things they wouldn't like women to hear; but in these parts some of the men are sure to tell the women afterwards, and then the women are vexed. I dare say *you* think that mean; but there are not so many of us here, you know, as there are in England; and so we are more confided in and thought of."

"Are you?" said Max, staring a little. "By Jove! if it is thinking much of a woman to soil her ears with all the after-dinner and stable talk in which men indulge, I'd rather think little of her; and if she were my wife or sister I'd request other men to do the same, and knock their heads off if they didn't."

The fair face in the shadow flushed up suddenly, and then dimpled into a laugh.

"And would you knock their heads off if they said 'by

Jove!' or 'confoundedly' before your wife or sister? *My* sisters never allow swearing in our house in Monte San Felipe: not in the sala, that is, nor in English or Spanish. As to other less familiar languages—well, we allow you some indulgence. Oaths in Sanscrit or even in Romaic Greek might be passed over; but please don't curse in Latin. Every one who goes to hear the bishop read out the annual excommunication against people who don't go to their duties on Low Sunday, understand *that*."

But Mr. Lorimer was sulky, and neither wanted to laugh nor be laughed at. This beautiful girl had frightened him at first by her severity and hauteur; and he had been honestly annoyed with himself for having offended her; but knowing her not at all, he hardly understood the rapid changes of mood which made her varying expressions doubly fascinating to others; and the ripple of merriment in her soft voice offended him, and made him think she had been leading him on to make game of him.

"I am glad you are so amiable," he answered shortly. "Perhaps, then, you will kindly make some indulgence for me; especially as I shall not be likely to offend you again by swearing or anything else."

"Oh, I am sure of that," said Lil, with a frank smile of forgiveness. She thought he had been quite punished enough

now. "And as to the swearing, *that* was only a joke. I am not angry at present, Mr. Lorimer."

"Thank you," he said, though not cheerfully, nor apparently conscious that she had stretched out the tips of two slender fingers beyond her white muffling. "Then I may consider my numerous confessions and apologies concluded, and—bid you good-bye."

"Or good night, rather," Lil answered nonchalantly; "for I am going to bed, and I suppose you to join the others at their cards. What a noise Mr. Meggan is making!"

"I am going to pay Nicholson the amount I owe him for the two wagers, and to put up my bag," said Lorimer. "I shall have left here before you are up to-morrow, Miss Hardy, so it was good-bye I meant—not good night."

"Oh, are you off so soon?" asked Lil quite cheerfully. "Perhaps you are afraid of becoming another Mr. Meggan. Well, you are wise; and besides, the shearing really begins to-morrow, and it is horrid work, they say—so greasy! Good-bye."

"Who's talking about going and good-byes?" cried Mrs. Logan, trotting out into the verandah, in a much flushed and rumpled condition from the lengthy slumber in which she had been indulging. "Why, Lil, what *are* you and Mr.

Lorimer about? He looks quite angry. You've not been quarrelling with one another, have you?"

"Well, I don't quite know," said Lil demurely. "I was angry with Mr. Lorimer, and inclined to quarrel with him a little while ago; but I have quite forgiven him now, and it is he who is angry and quarrelling with *me* at present. At least I think he is; are not you, Mr. Lorimer?"

She had risen as she spoke, and as she came forward into the moonbeams, letting the shawl slide downwards from her head and shoulders, there was something so pure and dazzling in the exquisite loveliness of her face and form, all radiant and etherealised in the silver light streaming down on her, that Max, always weak where women were concerned, felt a sudden reel in his senses as before a vision too fair for earthly realities: the realities of this rough place and rough company in particular. He put out his hands with a sort of appealing gesture as he answered her in a hoarse, hurried whisper:

"Hush, for God's sake! Be as hard on me as you like; but don't blaspheme yourself. 'Quarrel' with *you!*—who could?"

"Well, I said I would forgive you as you were sorry, and I offered to shake hands," said Lil aloud, and smiling. "It was you who wouldn't. Will you now?"

But as she spoke she stepped back to Mrs. Logan's side, putting her left arm round the fat little woman's waist; so that Max dared not lay more than the briefest pressure on the small soft hand which his trembling fingers would have liked nothing better than to clasp and crush. He bent his head above it as if it had been a queen's.

"Flirting again, Lil!" said Mrs. Logan, rather peevishly, when the two women were alone a little later. "I thought you weren't going to have anything to say to that young Lorimer; but you're a shocking girl, *no one's* safe from you."

Lil flashed round on her quite indignantly.

"Oh, how *can* you say so!" she said, opening her lovely eyes wide in honest reproach. "Why, it was quite the other way. I saw he was a man who would take liberties if he could, and I determined that he shouldn't: that he should see I was not *that* sort of girl at all. Why, I snubbed him and spoke very sharply to him, so sharply that he is going away. And why shouldn't he? He doesn't know how to shear, and we don't want idle men."

"Ah, why shouldn't he?" repeated Mrs. Logan absently. She had opened a chink in the rough wooden shutter which at night afforded some shield to the uncurtained candour of her bed-room window. "Why, indeed! Yes, I thought so!

It was he creaking about outside still, instead of going in to the other men like a sensible being. I suppose you have driven his senses away for the night, however, and—and what on earth has he got there? Oh, Lil, Lil, do come and see," cried Mrs. Logan, falling suddenly into such paroxysms of laughter that her plump form shook from head to foot like a badly-made jelly. "If he hasn't got your white shawl in his arms like a baby, and is kissing it! *Do* look at him! Well, of all——"

But instead of looking, Lil had interposed a sudden arm, and clapped the shutter to.

"I—*hate* that young man," she said fiercely, "and I shall hate you too, and go away, right away home next week, if you stand there looking at him, or say such *sonserias*[1] to any one else. Come into my room, and I'll brush your hair. It is no use thinking of going to sleep while those other men are making such a noise over their drink and cards. Will any of them be fit for work to-morrow?"

"They'll have to be," said Mrs. Logan sagely. "When a press of work is on, Logan don't wait to ask if the men in his house are *fit* for it or not."

[1] Foolishness.

CHAPTER V.

A SOUTH AMERICAN SHEARING.

"As fine a flock as ever grazed."—*Wordsworth.*

"Neat and trimly dressed,
Fresh as a bridegroom, and his chin new reaped
Showed like a stubble land at harvest home;
He was perfumèd like a milliner."

Henry IV., Act I. Scene ii.

"But these mine eyes saw him in bloody state,
Rendering faint quittance, wearied and outbreathed."

Ibid., Part II. Act I.

MRS. LOGAN was right, as Lil found out on the following morning, when she was awoke at peep of day by the sound of her host's deep voice, clear and resonant, as though last night's potations had had no more effect on it than on a church bell, shouting orders and adjurations in every accent of command and entreaty from the saddle where he was already seated, and sending *capataz*[1] and *peons* flying, some on foot and some on horseback, in every direction; while on peeping through the door of her room, which opened like all

[1] Head man, foreman.

the others into a big, unpaved patio, she caught a brief vision of Mr. Meggan, clad in a pair of canvas trousers as to his lower half, and the garb of the Apollo Belvidere (minus his cloak) as to the upper one, in the act of holding his manly form over a horse-trough, the while a small native boy, standing on the edge of the latter, poured a bucketful of water over his drooping head. It was but a momentary vision, for the shutter clapped to again as sharply as that other one had done on the previous night; but it was suggestive as the roll of drums before the battle fray. If even Meggy felt it necessary to use such strong measures for clearing his toddy-soddened brains, it must be that business was meant; and indeed the general stir and animation, the din and clatter of voices, the neighing of horses and trampling of hoofs, the incessant "baa—a" trembling on the air in every direction—nay, still more unwonted sound at that early hour, the patter of Mrs. Logan's feet (usually curled up under the bed-clothes till a much later period of the day), all betokened that the busiest time in all the year had dawned on the estancia.

Lil lost no time over her own toilet, and, hearing her host's voice outside, hardly waited to fasten the top button of her neat blue habit, before thrusting out her golden head into the sunlight, with the eager request:

"Mr. Logan, are you saying you must ride over to Gregorio's *puesto?* Oh, take me with you, do; I'm all ready."

"Is your horse ready too? Come by all means if it is; but I've no time to-day to saddle it for you, Lil," answered the good-tempered giant, barely pausing to nod to her ere dashing off to fire off a fresh volley of orders elsewhere; and Lil, hastening out into the verandah, was not sorry to come upon Mr. Meggan for the second time, though now "clothed, and in his right mind," so far, at least, as to be making up for the unwonted severity of his previous ablutions by an early cocktail. He was quite ready, however, to abandon that pleasure to saddle Miss Hardy's horse; or do anything else that might be required for the one person who always called him *Mr.* Meggan, said "please" in asking him for anything, and treated him generally as if he were something more than the hopelessly besotted and degraded wretch he himself, in his best moments, felt himself to be. Nay, he even had the pleasure of putting her up in the saddle, no one else being near, and Lil thanked him graciously, and tried not to shrink from the touch of the hot, shaky hand and greasy shoulder, and to keep her eyes from wandering off in search of some more fitting cavalier.

It was not yet six o'clock, the very best time of all others

for a gallop on a bright spring morning in the early half of October, and as the two horses swept along neck to neck over the rolling grass land, still sparkling with dew like a frostwork of silver lace over an amber mantle, and under a pale blue sky, across which strips of feathery cloud were racing each other in a brisk, sou'-westerly breeze, Lil felt her blood quicken and her pulses thrill, and sundry troubled thoughts which had come to her in the night disappear like mists before the sunshine.

Logan's errand was to a distant *puesto*, the owner of which had signified by one of the *peons* on the previous evening, that in consequence of a quarrel he had had with Tiburcio Lopez, the *capataz*, neither he nor one of the family would assist at the shearing that year.

"And there are six of them," cried the estanciero vehemently, "the cantankerous old devil himself and his wife and three boys and his wife's aunt, who, though she's seventy if she's a day, can clip with any nigger yet. Hang it, Lil! I counted on them all, for I'm short of hands and late for the shearing as it is, and shall be late for the market too if I don't hurry up. Nicholson and Campion have got theirs over ten days back; but it's always my luck, *Carramba!* Last year, just as we were going to begin, there came three days' drenching rain and washed all the grease out of the

wool, so that when it was cut it weighed thirty per cent. lighter than it should have done ; and this year——Che ! look there, Lil, yon's the house, and if the old brute hasn't seen us already, and is saddling up to be off in an opposite direction. Give that '*rosilla*'[1] of yours the rein, and we'll stop him yet."

Lil gladly obeyed ; and as by good fortune they not only succeeded in cutting off Don Gregorio's retreat, but in overcoming his reluctance to shear sheep under the belligerent eye of Don Tiburcio Lopez, the homeward ride was even pleasanter than the previous one had been ; and they had almost reached the estancia when Logan broke off in some story he was telling his companion, and exclaimed :

" Why, what the deuce ! I say, Lil, look there ! What *is* that young fool up to ? "

They were just cantering up to the front of the house as he spoke ; and standing outside it, with one arm leaning on his horse's neck, was the person referred to : a young man, wonderfully and beautifully got up in full *gaucho* costume ; but *gaucho* costume not as it is in reality, but as bought brand new from the shops, of extra superfine quality, and of a daintiness and costliness altogether too unlike anything worn by that dirty if picturesque individual in the flesh, to

[1] Chestnut-coloured horse.

resemble aught but one of those coloured lithographs of him taken home by young officers to exhibit to their admiring female relatives, and pronounced "quite too sweet, and the *very* thing for a fancy ball." It consisted of an exquisitely fine shirt and drawers of snow-white linen, the former with the collar turned down over a crimson silk neckerchief loosely knotted at the throat, and with the ends flying in the breeze; the latter finished off at the ankles with a deep frill of Paraguayan lace: on his feet white cotton stockings and canvas shoes with thick soles of plaited straw, and bound on to the leg with red woollen sandals, and over the drawers, girt about the loins by the embroidered belt with its glittering *onzas* in front and the orthodox knife and pistol at the back, the *chiripà*—a garment not unlike in shape and mode of arrangement that worn by infants of tender years in this country, but made in this case of richly-flowered damask, blue in hue and voluminous in size; while on his head he wore a second silk handkerchief equally brilliant in colour, knotted at the back, and surmounted by a low hat of pale grey felt, thrust backwards by a hasty gesture of his hand so as to afford a full view of the wrath and mortification struggling in the handsome face beneath as he turned in angry response to the volleys of chaff fired at him by three other men who, cigar in mouth, and clad in shabby coats,

worse trowsers, and long, unpolished boots, were looking down on him from the verandah above.

"Why d—— it all, Lorimer, my boy," cried out Nicholson the Scotchman, "you've gone and made a mistake! It was *shearing* I asked you to come over to Logan's for; not Carnival! That's a very pretty *mascarado* get up, old man, but you're just four months ahead of the time for it."

"Perhaps Mr. Lorimer thinks that fancy dress is like B. and S., good at all times," suggested Meggy, with a chuckle of delight at finding some one else occupying his usual post as a butt for general ridicule; while at the same moment, the third man, a Mr. Peters, who had only arrived at the estancia the night before, and whose speech and accent clearly betrayed that, though a well-to-do estanciero at present, he had in no-wise emerged from a very low grade of the lower middle-class, added his voice to the others by shouting out: "Hullo, Logan! Just in time. Hope you're flattered, man. 'Ere's Mr. Lorimer has got hisself up like a sixpenny fashion-plate all out o' compliment to these sheep of yourn. Happen he don't expec' to get greased by 'em neither, eh?—he, he, he!"

There was a fierce retort on Lorimer's lips, but at his host's name he wheeled round sharply, and in doing so encountered Lil's eyes sparkling with irrepressible fun which the spectacle of his brilliant attire had evoked, though she was as yet

scarcely conscious of the banter to which it had already subjected him. The sight of his face, white and set with passion, in conjunction with those grinning ones in the rear, sobered her in an instant, and made her keenly regretful of her ill-timed mirth, but the effect of her presence on Max was as instantaneous, and greater than she could have supposed. He grew paler if possible than before, under the added humiliation of her smile, and for a moment she saw his teeth meet sharply on his under lip; but the next instant he came towards her, doffing his hat, and observing with perfectly serene courtesy:

"Good morning, Miss Hardy. Returned from a pleasant ride, I hope. May I help you to dismount?" Then, turning to the merrymakers behind with glittering eyes, and speaking in a low, painfully restrained voice: "*I* don't insult other gentlemen before a lady," he said cuttingly; "therefore if they have a mind to continue their witticisms at my expense they can do so with safety—*in her presence!*"

Nicholson jumped down from the verandah, his face red with annoyance.

"Why, hang it all, Lorrimer, what do you mean?" he said angrily. "Who is thinking of insulting any one at present! We weren't laughing at *you*, man. It was your dress——"

But no one there was acquainted with the heat of Max

Lorimer's temper when his pride was touched, and he declined to listen.

"Thanks, much, for your interest in it," he retorted; "but, oddly enough, my dress is a matter the choice of which I reserve to myself and the professional tailor I employ; not to any amateur members of the trade, however well qualified for it; and in the present case, as I came to Mr. Logan's house, not for my own pleasure only, but to assist at his shearing, I am of opinion that the best costume for that work, or any other, is the one generally worn by the men whose business it is to perform it."

It was really a very fine speech, and but for one unlucky allusion (marked by Mr. Peters with a growling "D—— him! Who does he mean by 'tailors'?") might have sounded rather well and dignified in the mouth of the handsome young fellow who uttered it; but unfortunately the contrast between the real nature of the "work" alluded to and the exquisite show of snowy linen, blue damask, and crimson silk, was altogether too much for Peters' and Meggy's risible muscles; and Mr. Logan, whose own face had undergone sundry humorous convulsions a moment previously, thought it well to break in on the scene in a tone which the other men knew him well enough to take in earnest.

"Quite right, Mr. Lorimer, and very well said," he observed

briskly. "No one but a cad would quarrel before ladies; but out here we Englishmen mostly do better still—we don't quarrel at all; though I'm afraid, being rough fellows, some of our chaff isn't always refined enough to take as it's meant. You've got to learn, Meggy, that a joke ain't worth calling a joke when only one party can see it; and as for Mr. Lorimer's dress, in my opinion, he's very sensible to wear it. It's a thousand pities to let nice things lie by, as I often tell my wife about those bonnets of hers; and if these gentlemen see anything to find fault with in the way of smartness in your costume at present, Mr. Lorimer, I much doubt" (a slow smile growing under his heavy beard) "if they'll do so by midday. Now, come into breakfast all of you, for we've no time to waste, and there's always jawing enough among the natives on days like this without our setting them an example."

He nodded good-naturedly to Lorimer as he spoke, and flinging his reins to a *peon*, put his arm through Nicholson's, and strode into the house, followed by the other men laughing a little, but quietly, among themselves. Lil had preceded them, but at the entrance to the corridor she paused, hesitated a little, and then walked frankly back to where Max was still standing biting the ends of his heavy moustache, while the red and white patches on his face testified to the keen mortification and anger from which he was suffering. Ever since

that scene with Captain Carnegie, Lil had become the veriest coward before any display of wrath or bitterness among men but she spoke to him very sweetly and soothingly :

"Do not be vexed any more, Mr. Lorimer, or we shall feel it a slur on our hospitality to a stranger. Haven't you found out yet that every one chaffs every one here? We all do it, with cause or without; and nobody minds it, not even I. You see we don't *mean* it for rudeness. You believe that, I am sure."

"I should believe anything you told me," said Lorimer, smiling the more readily because he was honestly ashamed to see how the little hand holding up the folds of her riding-habit was trembling. "But, please, don't identify yourself with men of that class! I was a fool to lose my temper with them even for a moment, but it was really the fact of your presence that made their vulgarity so irritating to me. As you say, they know no better."

"Then don't think any more of such nonsense, but come in to breakfast, for you've a hard day's work before you, you know," said Lil, too intent on her work of peacemaking to stop to think whether Max might not assume from it that she took a greater interest in him than was the case, or even to tell him (as she might have done) that in the camp there is no question of this class or that, but that every man is rated

at as much as he is worth on his own merits. She saw the young Englishman was of an unusually fiery temperament, and she thought he had been rather hardly treated. There was nothing else in her mind as she walked in to breakfast with Mr. Lorimer, quite pacified and polite again, at her side.

Not much time was wasted on conversation during the meal, or indeed on the meal at all; and yet even before it was over Logan had left his plate half-a-dozen times to give orders and make inquiries; and all the time the increasing noise outside, greetings given and returned, shouts and laughter, neighing of horses, barking of dogs, and trampling of hoofs, betokened constant arrivals of new-comers on the scene, and made a wide difference in the usual quiet, lazy, make-believe-at-doing-something order of things prevalent at Casa Blanca.

Widely different indeed! Even before breakfast, Lil, who had had no previous experience of a shearing, had had her curiosity excited by seeing two large fires blazing out of doors in the neighbourhood of the house, with half a side of beef roasting on an iron spit at either of them; but she could hardly believe her eyes when, on going out into the verandah, she saw the whole ground about the estancia dotted over with groups of people—men, women, and children, white, black, and brown, in every variety of dress and undress—standing

about or sitting together, laughing, chattering, bargaining, sucking *matés*, or cutting huge slices (each with his or her own knife) off the frizzling *asado*,[1] which had already dwindled to a fourth of its usual proportions; a constant, plaintive bleating vibrating through clouds of dust on every side, and mingling with the cracking of whips and oaths of mounted *peons* driving up the flocks of frightened, dusty, heavy-laden sheep to the pens, whence they were to be extracted when the moment came for denuding them of their wool; dogs yelping and leaping, new-comers arriving on horseback at every moment, and only waiting to pull a stake from the huge wood-pile to fasten their horses to along with the row of others, which were already giving the house the air of a barrack for irregular cavalry.

Suddenly there was a shout from the *capataz*, taken up by several voices, "*à la cancha! à la cancha!*"—and forthwith eating, laughing, and gossip came to a close, and there was a general scurry and rush in one direction—the main endeavour of all the assembled shearers, men and women alike, being to get hold of the smaller and scabby-looking sheep first: those in fact which being only half-fleeced were easiest to shear and earn payment for.

The gentlemen had gone off beforehand to the shearing-

[1] Roast.

shed to assist: Logan himself making a point of being everywhere on these occasions; while even Max resisted the desire to linger at Lil's side, and rolling up the snowy shirt-sleeves from a pair of wrists more shapely than strong, put himself under his host's orders for the day's work with an air of determination and energy at which (having regard to his touchiness) none of the others ventured to smile.

Lil soon got tired of the noise, dust, and glare; and, being left to herself, was glad to follow Mrs. Logan's example, and retreat to her own room for a bath and siesta, from which they only emerged to set the table for the mid-day luncheon for the gentlemen, who came in before long, looking hot, greased, and dirty beyond description, and after a hasty wash fell to at the viands provided for them with a ravenous appetite. Max Lorimer was not among them, however; and Mr. Logan observed that the young man had preferred to stay and see the *gauchos* dining: adding with a twinkle in his usually dull blue eye, "I expect he don't think that costume of his is quite as dandified for lunch as it was for breakfast."

"*I* expect then he stayed away out of respect for Lil and me," said Mrs. Logan, pouting; "for I must say—leaving manners aside—that the rest of you are unsavoury company at present. But who is he, Mr. Nicholson? I've not had

an opportunity to ask you before, and Jack never knows anything."

"*Who* is he? Oh, just an idle young swell, Mrs. Logan," said the Scotchman; "one of those who come out to these parts with more money in their pockets than they know what to do with, and generally go back with nothing but the clothes they stand up in, and their passage paid by the folks who want to get rid of them. This youngster has been one of the wild ones, living too fast, as the phrase is, and sent out here by his guardian, with whom he has quarrelled, to be kept out of the hands of the Jews. How far they'll succeed remains to be seen. He's been six weeks on this side of the pond, and was scattering his dollars so wildly in Buenos Ayres that Denman, the vice-consul there, sent him over to me to get him out of the way."

"I suppose you mean that every one was trying to rob the poor boy," said Mrs. Logan. "You'd better leave him with us, Mr. Nicholson. He'd be safe enough here; and I think him charming; so aristocratic and nice-looking, isn't he, Lil?" But Lil was eating, and made no answer. Perhaps she did not hear.

Outside, fires were crackling, and meat roasting, and the work of dining still going on among the shearers, who, released from labour, gave themselves up with the liveliest

relish to the consumption of huge flakes of roasted or boiled flesh, and bowlfuls of a sort of thick, greyish porridge made from *fariña*, than which a nastier compound could never be imagined by the mind of civilised man; but which disappeared with every sign of "gusto" down the capacious throats for which it was destined, and was washed down with innumerable *matés*, accompanied by a very babel of mirth, songs, and chatter, and intermingled with smoking and games of chance: at many of which no small proportion of money (or tokens received in lieu of money on every five fleeces) had already changed hands.

It was lucky for a good many of the gamblers when the signal for work again sounded; for more than one simmering quarrel was already causing loosening of knives in certain sheaths; and by-and-by when it got cooler the ladies sallied out from the house, sheltered under big white umbrellas, and with their clean print dresses daintily kilted, and paid a visit to the various groups scattered about, stopping here and there to speak to a nursing mother, or notice a pretty child; and everywhere exciting intense interest and admiration by their fair skins and pretty, fresh attire.

Nicholson and Peters, who had knocked off some time ago, and gone in to solace themselves with pipes and cold brandy-and-water, accompanied them; but of Max Lorimer

they still saw nothing until they got to the shearing-shed, whither they were specially bound with fresh *matés* for the gentlemen yet engaged there. It was a huge building, about ninety feet in length by twenty broad, with a temporarily-boarded floor, and at either end big tables already piled high with dusty yellow wool dripping with the amber-coloured grease which shone on every undulation of the merino. Behind these tables stood a number of men, hard at work tying fleeces, and passing them when done into an inner shed to be classified and piled; while in front of them, squatted about on the floor, were from twenty to thirty men, women, and children, each with his sheep before him, shearing away for dear life, and each trying to outdo the other in the number got through.

Max Lorimer was one of them; but in the first moment Lil positively did not know him! His hat was off, and his hair was plastered down over his forehead with heat and perspiration. Fatigue, and the strong, rank smell of the wool, had made him deadly pale. His smart white shirt was torn into rags by struggles with recalcitrant sheep; and, like his hands, arms, and lower garments, was black and shiny with dirt and grease, and stained with gouts of blood shed by more than one unlucky animal under his maiden shears.

Mrs. Logan held up her fat hands in horror, and poured

forth a torrent of commiseration over him. "*Was* that he? And still at that filthy work! Why *did* he do it? Why did Logan *let* him? And he was looking so ill, and so—so—did he know *how* he looked?—Oh, do come away, and rest, and have some tea. Lil, do persuade him. I'm sure *you* could."

"If I did it would be for the sake of the other men," said Lil calmly, and guessing by the flush and frown which had risen to the young man's face that the matron's consternation at his appearance was beyond measure irritating and distasteful to him: "I dare say Mr. Lorimer is like Mr. Logan, and likes work; but he will make the others feel very lazy if he persists in going on after old hands like they have left off."

Max looked up at her rather gratefully. The girl's delicate intuition had not been wrong; for a moment back he had been as near hating her and Mrs. Logan as ever a young man was yet; but the gentle unconcern of the girl's tone, and the composure with which her sweet blue eyes rested on him, as if there was nothing at all out of the way or to be shocked at in his appearance, was reassuring to the young fellow's vanity, and gave him a loophole for the very thing of all others he was longing to do. His head was fairly swimming with the heat of the sun, the noise and clatter, the "clip, clip, clip!" on every side, the perpetual shout of "*Cinco*:

cinco !" [1] from one side or another, calling for the token that five fleeces had been got through, the "ba-aing" of the frantic sheep, the cry of "*Medico !*" [2] whenever an unlucky jag with the shears necessitated a dab of tar on the wounded part from a can carried about by a lad for that purpose—and all the other sounds and noises incidental to the occasion. His legs were stiffened with squatting in a cramped position ; his arms ached as if they would drop off. It was only indeed from obstinacy and a certain feeling of pride that he had kept on so long. Those other fellows had jeered at him as if he were a mere china shepherd and Jack-a-dandy, and he had made a fool of himself, and not mended matters, by taking too lofty a tone with them on the subject. The only thing left was to prove them in the wrong by sticking to his word at any rate, and, having said he had put on *gaucho's* dress to work like a *gaucho*, to go on at it as long as the toughest *gaucho* there. He had even rejoiced when with the very first sheep he handled all superfine freshness departed on the instant from his smart shirt and *chiripà ;* but among civilised men there is unfortunately a limit to the enjoyment of dirt and grease ; and even before noonday Max had passed that limit, and had reached the more unchristian one of wishing a kindly Providence would remove Nicholson and

[1] Five. [2] Doctor !

Peters to a better world, and provide him with a cold bath, a feather-bed, and a gallon of iced champagne. Matters had, however, got much worse with him by now. He was so tired and sick that he had begun to have a loathing of himself and the whole thing, as well as a feeling of sullenness and ill-usage, which Logan's good-humoured advice to "take it easy," twice repeated, only aggravated.

Take it easy? As if any one could take such a hard and beastly work easily; or, seeing the way in which he was slaving, could use such a word to him at all. He hadn't a doubt Logan and those other cads enjoyed seeing him slave. Perhaps they had a bet on as to how soon he'd break down. Well, if so, they shouldn't make much by it; for he'd be hanged if he broke down at all, or knocked off one half-second before the last soul on the place.

But Lil's pretty way of remonstrating gave quite a new turn to the matter; and, by lending a colour of ungenerosity to his persistence, gave him a loophole for retreat, of which he would certainly have availed himself if it had not happened that Mr. Peters was near enough to hear what was said. He was an essentially vulgar, coarse-witted man, a much richer and more successful one than Logan; and his pride was affronted at hearing Lil complimenting "the swell,"

as he put it, at the expense of himself and the other guests. He broke in with a harsh laugh.

"No, no, not so bad as that, Miss Hardy! We are not come down to being jealous of Mr. Lorimer's industry yet awhile. Logan said he was short of men for the shearing, so I brought him over two good ones of mine, and have given a helping hand myself into the bargain. If he had said he wanted *butchers* 'twould have been another thing, and I'm free to confess I wouldn't have entered the field again' Mr. Lorimer. But there!—there's no anti-vivisection laws in this country, and if Logan thinks it's good for his sheep to be let blood freely at this season, that's *his* look-out. Go on and welcome, Mr. Lorimer. You won't make Nicholson and me unhappy on the score of our laziness that way, and maybe in a year or so we'll have a shearing-match again' you to make up. 'Twouldn't be fair now; for you see we know *how*. Clipping mutton's one trade, and needs practice maybe; but *carving* mutton is another, and I'm d—d if you wouldn't take a gold medal in that to-day, and without any further practice whatsumever."

"Sir!" cried Max, flinging down his shears in a rage, and half rising—"you think yourself very witty; but I'd have you to know that gentlemen are not in the habit——" but of *what* remained unknown, for the sentence was not finished.

In leaping up over-hastily from his cramped position, one foot had entangled itself in some way, and he stumbled and fell back again with a sudden, sharp exclamation.

"Hullo! What's up? Not hurt yourself, have you?" cried Mr. Peters good-naturedly, noticing that Max did not recover himself immediately, and that a queer whiteness had come over his face. The young man looked up at him.

"No, pray—take the ladies away—that's all," he said in a very low, changed voice. "This can't—be a—pleasant place for—for them."

"Nor for you neither, Mr. Lorimer," cried Mrs. Logan sympathetically. "So just you come along with us, and don't mind Mr. Peters' jokes. He ought to be ashamed of himself, for them, and— But why! What's *that?*" she cried, interrupting herself with a shriek, and starting back as she saw a narrow red stream beginning to trickle across the boards in her direction.

"It's—it's nothing. I've cut myself a little. Mr. Peters —d—n it!—*please* take them away," stammered Max; and sinking backwards fainted dead away like any woman.

CHAPTER VI.

MAX LORIMER.

"And now Childe Harold was sore sick at heart,
And from his fellow-bacchanals would flee;
. . . . . .
And from his native land resolved to go,
And visit scorching climes beyond the sea."
Byron (*'Childe Harold'*).

"A spoiled child, and rambling like the wind."—*Wordsworth.*

THAT ended Mr. Lorimer's experience of a South American shearing. He had fallen with his leg across the open blades of the implement in use, cutting a deep and nasty gash across the calf; and Mr. Logan and Peters not only carried him up to the house, but had got him on to a bed, and washed and strapped up the wound before he even recovered consciousness. He came to, then, and they gave him a big tumbler of brandy-and-water, after swallowing a little of which he sat up, tried to laugh, and asked what they were making such a fuss over him for; it was nothing, only a clip, and why didn't they give him a dab of the tar-brush on it? What was

sauce for the sheep should be sauce for the shepherd—in the middle of which his mouth went white again, the glass slipped out of his hand, and off he slid into a second faint, the result quite as much of exhaustion from over-fatigue as from loss of blood.

This one, however, only lasted a few minutes, and perhaps on the whole the accident was not wholly unlucky; for Peters, who was not an unkindly man at heart, and who saw that his friend Logan was by no means pleased with him as being the cause of the accident, was so hearty in his contrition and sympathy with regard to it, that Max could hardly do anything but show his own generosity by making as light of the affair as possible, and treating it in a jesting spirit as entirely the result of his own clumsiness. Indeed, his gracious good-humour on the occasion, and his subsequent apologies and gratitude to Mrs. Logan when she brought him in his supper, and what he wanted more, a change of clean linen, in her own hands, not only won him golden opinions from those who had regarded him with decided prejudice beforehand, but fascinated his already admiring hostess to such a degree that she quite rejoiced in the prospect of having such a beautifully-mannered invalid on her hands, and so pestered him with attentions, and condolences, and entreaties to be allowed to do this, that, and the other for him, that Max had some ado to

maintain the courtesy which had so charmed her; and only bore up under the infliction by the hope that some one else, whom he had not seen since the accident, would be equally compassionate to him when they next met.

But this was not to be as soon as he thought. Lil's nerves had never been strong since that ghastly event of eighteen months ago, and the mere sight of Max Lorimer's corpse-like face as he sank back on the floor with the blood flowing from him, had completely overcome her. By a tremendous effort of will she just managed to keep herself from fainting at the time; but an hour later, Mrs. Logan found her in her own room lying face downwards on the bed, and shaking from head to foot with a passion of hysterical sobs, which her efforts to repress only made more violent. Mrs. Logan got quite frightened at last, and having tried in vain salts and sal-volatile, and even her husband's favourite panacea for "all the ills that flesh is heir to", a strong glass of brandy-and-water, was fain to comply with the girl's own entreaty, sobbed out in the intervals of the hysterical agony which was rending her, to leave her alone; she was "very sorry, but she couldn't help it, she couldn't indeed, and it would pass over if she were only left alone." She was right; it did—and she was even able to appear at supper later, and take her usual helpful

part as assistant-hostess, but looking so ill and shaken that Mrs. Logan said to her in astonishment:

"Why, Lil, I'd no idea you were so weak! You sha'n't catch another glimpse of Mr. Lorimer till he's all right and sound again, I can tell you. I shall give you charge of the other men and the house, and take the nursing of him into my own hands; for the poor fellow wants quite one person's care and attention, and I'm sure he's been used to no end of it at home. Such pretty manners, too, as he has, when he likes. I declare I could kill that Peters for laying him up—the beast!"

"Mr. Peters is very sorry," said Lil, somewhat coldly, because she knew that her lips were still white, and she was feeling so terribly ashamed of her own want of self-control. "And after all, I don't see how he is to be blamed, because Mr. Lorimer has such an unfortunately quick temper."

"How? Because he oughtn't to have roused it. He's always cheeking Logan, laying down the law and that, because he makes double out of his estancia what we do of ours; but to try it on that young Lorimer, who any one might see wouldn't stand it, not being his own sort at all—La! Lil, I wonder *you* can stand up for him, and you who are so high yourself at times!"

"I think Mr. Lorimer is a little *too* high," said Lil, calmly;

"and from what his friend Mr. Nicholson says, I don't see that he has any very great cause to be, that is all;" and she went away, leaving Mrs. Logan to return in an extra flutter of compassionate tenderness to her patient.

Nicholson had been pretty accurate in his account of the latter, so far as it went. Max Lorimer was a spoilt child, the only son of a Berkshire squire of good family, who was killed by an accident in the hunting-field three months before his son's birth. His mother, who was still very young at the time of her husband's death, had married again before the child was old enough to toddle unaided across the floor—this time to the Colonel of a Scotch regiment, a widower with one little daughter just three years old; and in this way the two children were brought up together as brother and sister; not even being aware for some years that they did not in truth bear that relationship to one another. On one side indeed they had no cause to do so. Mrs. Lorimer—or Duncan, to call her by her second name—was a weak, fond, gentle-natured woman, who spoilt and petted both children equally; and probably only worshipped Max so much more than his step-sister as mothers are in the habit of worshipping their sons (only sons in particular) in preference to their daughters; while her husband dealt the same measure of cold indifference to each; casting a thin veil over the dislike he soon grew to

feel for the wilful, mother-coddled boy, who gave him more trouble in a week than his daughter did in a year, because to show it openly would have pained the young wife who was the only being he really loved; but showing no more tenderness to his own child than to his step-son, and never unbending to either. The effect on the two was, however, widely different. Max hated his step-father long before he was out of Eton jackets and collars, considered him a gloomy old tyrant, and found rather a pleasure than otherwise in provoking him. Alice loved him with a timid, pathetic affection born chiefly of duty; but reserved her caresses and familiarity for the gentle step-mother whom she adored with all the warmth of a tender and grateful little heart; and devoted herself to the latter's assistance in helping Max out of the scrapes he was for ever getting into, and standing between him and her father's displeasure as far as was in her power.

As long as Mrs. Duncan lived it all worked fairly well; for Max, though inclined to be wild and thoughtless, was upright and affectionate enough by nature, and always amenable to his mother's tender remonstrances; while her husband, as I have said, was too much attached to his wife to interfere as harshly in her son's guidance as the severity of his own nature prompted, even if a feeling of delicacy had not in some degree withheld him from the attempt.

For one thing, he was a very poor man, with no income besides his half-pay and the rental of a dilapidated shooting-box with a few acres of land attached to it in the north of Scotland; while his second wife was, if not what is called a rich woman, at least so well off as to render the advantages of matrimony too distinctly on his side for a man of any delicacy to care to presume unwarrantably on the rights involved in them. If *she* chose to bring up her son in foolish luxury, and never refuse him anything he asked for, it was not for the Colonel, who benefited at least equally by the lady's generosity, to do more than remonstrate when her indulgence could be shown to be prejudicial to the youth himself; while at other times he simply held his tongue and showed his inward displeasure by increased raspiness of manner to the household in general, and by cutting down some perfectly necessary article in his daughter's expenditure as something which "could no longer be afforded." This always pained Mrs. Duncan exceedingly, and made her miserable lest she was being selfishly extravagant towards her own child; but it was not till her death, which occurred when Max was just twenty, that anything like real troubles began in the household; and these were chiefly owing to the complex rights and ownerships as to the property, which at her demise devolved on her husband and son.

It was in this wise. When Mrs. Duncan married her first husband, he had only just come into his Berkshire property, and was not only in debt himself, but had just had the mortification of finding that the place to which he had looked to clear him and set him right in the world again, had been so heavily mortgaged during his father's lifetime, that, but for the accident of his having married a wife with money, he could not even have afforded to live in his own home, but must have gone out into the world to earn one for himself.

Mrs. Lorimer's fortune, some £20,000, put matters to rights. It was settled on herself; but by an arrangement with her trustees, a certain portion of the capital was allowed to be borrowed by her husband; and by the aid of this, and a judicious use of the interest, the estate was not only cleared of debt, but put into good order, the farms on it improved, and rents raised, so that the young Squire had just been able to pay back the loan incurred, and feel that he was now at liberty to enjoy life with a clear conscience, when his sudden and untimely death cut him off within three years of his marriage, and three months of the time when his hopes of becoming a father were about to be realised.

By his will all he had to leave—the house and land, which was after all quite a small property, bringing in from the tenant-rents an income of something like eight hundred a

year—was devised to his wife in trust for their child (if any) till the latter attained the age of twenty-five years; or, in the event of the child not surviving, to herself absolutely for life, after which it was to revert to the next of kin; and this of course remained unaltered by her second marriage. The larger portion of her income, however, was that belonging to her in her maiden days, and amounted to a thousand a year good; and this, by a perfectly just settlement before her marriage with Colonel Duncan, was secured to that gentleman for his use during life, and to descend to her child or children after his decease.

As she had no other children, the details of this bequest need not be gone into. As a matter of fact the whole of the money would sooner or later—supposing he survived his step-father—come to Max; and as the young man was not at all of an avaricious or mercenary nature, it is most likely that he would (if his step-father had only treated him with common friendliness and cordiality) have acquiesced in the arrangement as a matter of course, and have ordered his expenses to meet the wishes of his senior during the five years of his minority, as he had always supposed himself to be doing during those of the past.

But it was not possible for Colonel Duncan to be either friendly or cordial under the circumstances. He was a stern

and chilly-souled person by natural disposition, and to this, chronic liver complaint had added an habitual, acrid peevishness, hard for any young people to bear, and which the very presence of his step-son aggravated to intensity. He was not a church-goer or a religious man himself; but to see the handsome lad marching off to church on Sunday mornings with his mother hanging fondly on his arm; or reclining sultan-like on a sofa of an evening, whilst Alice, seated on a stool beside him, sang hymn after hymn to his order, was gall and wormwood to the elder man; while to come upon Max distributing lavish pennies among the tenants' children, who all called him "th' yoong squire," and would leave off work or play, and hang about the neighbourhood of the Hall for the sake of a word or smile from him, was almost more than he could bear. And Max was perfectly aware of his step-father's weaknesses in these respects; and, having plenty of boyish wilfulness and conceit in his disposition, and a decided weakness of his own, for the *rôle* of lord and master, whenever that was possible to him, took pleasure in playing on the elder man's susceptibilities, and aggravating them to the utmost.

"But, dear John, what has the boy *done* that you seem so vexed with him?" poor Mrs. Duncan used to say tearfully. 'I am sure I am always very particular with him, and he is

the best and most loving son to me: so truthful and gentlemanly in all his ways and thoughts. Lady Sutton was only saying yesterday how she envied us such a one;" while Alice, without actually understanding why her step-brother's demonstrations of affection to his mother, and airs of lordship in the household, should be so irritating to her father, did her best to keep the two apart, and to smooth down points of irritation on either side, even if she herself suffered in the process. It was to no effect, however—the Colonel and his step-son never met without jarring; and as by a very natural error of judgment, Mrs. Duncan had, while her boy was still young, constituted her husband his guardian in the event of her own decease, their meetings were necessarily as frequent as they were unpleasant.

The fact is, the Colonel felt himself an ill-used man, and being also a severely honourable one, was fain to respect the rights, even to the uttermost point, of the cause of his ill-usage, and only to console himself by making them as little agreeable to the latter as he could. He had a house which he had remodelled to his own taste, and which suited him to a T; grounds which he had laid out and added to at much trouble and expense; horses of which he justly boasted; a well-invested income amounting altogether to some £2000 a year, which habits of economy, combined with a refined and

cultured taste, enabled him to lay out to better advantage than most men; and all this was not his own, but simply lent to him in trust for a flippant, conceited, extravagant lad whom he didn't like, who didn't like him, and whose existence at all had been the one thorn in the eighteen years of his otherwise happy married life. For all that time he had been to all intents and purposes a man of wealth and position, and looked up to as such in the neighbourhood; and now, just as he was getting an old man, just as these things were becoming more than ever necessary and pleasant to him, he was threatened with the loss of them; not even as a probable, but as an inevitable and speedy contingency. In five years—five short years more—the pretty little Berkshire estate, carrying with it half his dignity and nearly a-third of his income, would have to be handed over to Max Lorimer without haggle or question; while the remainder, which of course would not be sufficient to maintain him and his daughter in anything like the same style as before, was only his to use during his life. He could not marry another rich woman, and beget heirs on the strength of it. He could not dower his daughter with it. He could not leave a penny of it away, or even touch a farthing of the principal, were it but to invest it in a more lucrative manner. It was all tied up for the future comfort and benefit of this same thankless

lad; and the more the Colonel thought of it all—of how different it would have been if his wife had survived him (as a woman twenty years his junior might reasonably have been expected to do), if she had given him sons of his own, in which case Max could only have come into a share of his mother's property; or even if he had had the sense to sell out when he could have done so, and so added to his own small income, instead of wasting precious sums of it on luxurious improvements to a house which was not his own — the more these thoughts preyed upon him the more his liver suffered, and the more surly and morose he became.

The immediate effect was one equally disagreeable to himself, his daughter, and his step-son; namely, an extreme and niggardly parsimony. He put down his carriage; sold the horses; dismissed half the servants at the Hall, including footman and lady's-maid, and, being immediately given warning by the remaining half, engaged cheaper and commoner ones in their stead; limited Max's allowance at Oxford to the very lowest sum compatible with his living there at all; raised the tenants' rents wherever he could do so without the risk of losing them altogether; and informed his daughter that for the next five years he meant to reside during the entire summer at his cottage in Scotland, instead of the few

weeks in the grouse season that he usually spent there, and to let the Hall in his absence to whoever would take it.

To say that Max was astounded and indignant at what he considered this shameful and miserly conduct, is nothing; he was positively furious; and not seeing at first that the Colonel's object was to begin to lay by as much as he could for the short time of power remaining to him, decided that the old gentleman must have gone raving mad, and told his half-sister so in plain terms, urging her most vehemently to assist him in a decided revolt against her father's insane tyranny. It was all no use, however; neither indignation, arguments, nor remonstrances had any effect in changing Colonel Duncan's resolutions; and as his daughter, though sadly grieved by the sudden changes in their old and happy life, was far too good and gentle to be tempted to anything like rebellion against her father's authority, Max took the simple course of publishing his wrongs on all sides, and then going his own way, being as extravagant as he pleased—getting into debt, and leaving it to his guardian to pay or not, according as the latter's sense of honour obliged him.

Naturally, this enraged the elder gentleman on his side, and the scenes between them during each vacation soon came to such a pass that Max ceased to come home at those times at all, and either accepted invitations from some of his

college friends, or, under plea of "reading by himself", took rooms somewhere on his own account.

"If the governor expects me to bury myself in that beastly hole of his in the Highlands, he's mistaken," he told Alice; "and as for the Hall under the new *régime*, without mother, and *with* him, I can't stand it, and should be ashamed to do so if I could. I'll come back there when I'm master, and you may come too then, if you will; but meanwhile, we must just steer our boats apart, and if you'll allow me, I'll manage the helm of mine myself."

The end of all this came like a thunder-clap, though not sooner nor very differently from what ny one might have expected as to the fate of a high-spirited, impetuous, and susceptible lad, deprived of the tender mother influence which had been his only guiding star in the past; and thrown practically on the world and his own devices at the age of twenty, with no thought of loving home faces in the background to restrain him, and a host of fast, hard-living friends, only too ready to flatter and fleece a young fellow known to be free of hand, and reported to have much larger expectations than was actually the case. After all, as regarded himself morally, things might have been worse; he only spent where those about him sponged, and was duped by women whom they would have duped instead. But when

the full news of his iniquities reached his guardian, and it became known that he was not only in debt for considerably over a thousand pounds, but threatened with a breach of promise case by a woman ten years his senior, and of worse than doubtful reputation, it seemed as if no dye could be black enough to paint the young man's conduct, or describe the horror and consternation of the two people most immediately concerned by it.

The news nearly broke his step-sister's heart. Subdued in manner through her father's harshness, and timidly reserved as to outward expression at all times, she had loved her adopted brother dearly from the days when they had played together as tiny children in the Hall nurseries, and when her eighteen months of seniority had made little Max so infinitely the junior as to demand all manner of gentleness and concessions in her dealings with him. Her step-mother's death—the only mother that she, poor girl, had ever known—had been a heavy grief to her; and though practically separated from Max in the three uncomfortable years following it, and hearing nothing but ill of the young fellow from Colonel Duncan, she never ceased to think of, and pray for, him by night and day, and to plead for him by word of mouth with her father, and by letter with his own better nature, whenever she had an opportunity for so doing.

In neither case, however, had her pleadings any effect beyond the immediate one of embroiling her with both parties, making her father furiously angry with her, and still further embittering him against his step-son; while Max, though always accustomed to reverence his mother and sister as the two wholly pure and good women of his acquaintance, had been too used to unlimited worship and indulgence from them in his boyish days, to be content with anything short of fullest sympathy and championship at present. People must either be on his side altogether, or against it; and his sister's conscientious inability to be either, to pronounce his wrong right, or even to give outward expression to the blame she might give in her own heart to her father's conduct, seemed to the young man nothing but rank puritanism and cold-heartedness. Letters sound differently from spoken words, and the gentle remonstrances in hers, beside the flatteries of women whom he would not have endured to see in her presence, stung and mortified him. He flatly accused her of "going over to the enemy", and caring for him no longer, and punished her forthwith, in man's fashion, by ceasing to appeal to her good offices for him, or even to confide in her as he had always done in the past.

Yet when the crash came, it was Alice Duncan who roused

her father at last to the effort of stepping in to the aid of his troublesome and detested ward.

"Oh, father, think what mother would have felt if she had been here!" she cried out, kneeling beside him with tears pouring from her eyes, "and for her sake, do what you can for him. This could never have happened if she had been spared to us, and he is *her* son—her very own. She trusted him to us because she loved us; and we—what don't *we* owe to her love! Father, you will help him. You can't do otherwise now he owns he is in the wrong;" and Colonel Duncan, stung by her words, perhaps to a sense of certain shortcomings on his own part not only abstained from flying into a rage; but for once in his life did act as warmly and energetically in his step-son's behalf as though the relationship between them had been a more real and kindly one. Out of the rigorously accumulated savings of the last few years he paid some of Max's debts in full, compounded for others, and effected a compromise with the designing woman who had inveigled a hot-headed, foolish boy into the crowning folly of a suggestion of marriage. Indeed, for the time being, he spared neither trouble, expense, nor ingenuity in his ward's service; and if his demeanour towards the young man was unbending in its severity, and the conditions on which his good offices were performed sternly exacted, and

secured by a written promise beforehand, Max was too overwhelmed for the moment by the consequences of his own foolish imprudence to complain of any harshness in his treatment, or resent conditions even less capable of being shown to be for his own benefit. In effect they were simply these. The money advanced was to be regarded as a loan from Colonel Duncan, to be repaid within a fixed period with moderate interest, and Max himself was to remain at Oxford long enough to take his degree, and then leave England immediately, and settle himself abroad for the space of two years at least, on an allowance of a hundred-and-fifty a year, in some place (one of the colonies by preference) where he could obtain employment, and by hard work and economy, not only break himself of the habits he had acquired, but free himself of the debt incurred with less injury to his capital than would otherwise be the case.

This is how young Lorimer came to be in South America at the present moment. He had taken his degree easily enough within a few months of the affair above described, and the first year of his exile had been spent very agreeably on the continent as tutor to a young college friend, the son of a noble lord, who had not only suggested, but insisted on the arrangement: representing to his father with much warmth that Lorimer had been "shamefully treated by a

niggardly screw of a step-father, who having made his pile out of the mother in the first instance, was doing the same out of the son in the second, playing the usurer by him, and keeping him out of his property so as to enjoy it the longer himself: that Max was an awfully clever fellow, straight as a line, and capital form, never did a dirty act in his life, and likely to be in Parliament some day; and that therefore it behoved those who were his friends to give him a leg up in this his hour of need." The noble lord's answer to all this was to offer Max the post in question, and the young man accepted it at once, and greatly to the rage of his guardian, who accused him of breaking through the spirit of the conditions imposed by so doing, and even forbid his daughter to see her step-brother, or bid him farewell before the latter's departure from England. Probably he was not far wrong in his disapproval of the course proposed. It worked well enough at first. The young men hunted reindeer in Norway, shot bears in Russia, boated on the Rhine, and dabbled in dilettante art in Rome with much satisfaction, and little harm to themselves or any one else. Then they came to Nice, and within easy distance of Nice are the gaming-tables of Monaco. Max's friend went in for playing and winning; and Max himself, who had begun by declaring that he did not mean to touch one penny of his allowance, but live on his

salary, and who till now had kept his word with much spirit and constancy, held out for a week or so, and did his best to hold his pupil back too; then fell into the temptation, and in one night lost every penny in his possession. Next day he drew fifty pounds of his allowance, and lost that before dinner-time. A friend of the lordling's papa happened to be at the tables, saw what was going on, and telegraphed home about it; and the result of the letters and telegrams received in quick response was that Max, mad with himself for his want of self-control, and knowing that the next post would probably bring him a budget of abuse and reproaches from his guardian, resigned his post as tutor, and within a week had sailed for South America. Some one, whom he had met at Nice, had spent some years there, and fired his imagination by descriptions of the gorgeous climate and free life in the Argentine Republic, as well as of the large fortunes easily made there by young Englishmen as cattle or sheep farmers.

This gentleman gave him an introduction to the consul at Buenos Ayres, in which he mentioned that the young fellow was a man of family, the heir to a good property, and a great friend of Lord Erlscourt, while Max's whilom pupil, terribly concerned at the trouble into which his own wilfulness had led his friend, insisted on pressing on him a loan of money, which,

with the remaining hundred of his allowance, would be sufficient for his immediate needs for some time; and thus supplied, Max sailed from Bordeaux by the French mail to the River Plate; not even troubling himself to acquaint his guardian with his destination, and full of an enthusiastic resolve to so distinguish himself in the New World as to blot out all memory of past escapades, and overwhelm his detractors with confusion long ere his return.

So far this enthusiasm had resulted in getting him sent over to Uruguay by the friendly Consul, and laying him up at Jack Logan's with a nasty slit in his right leg, and in close proximity to a girl so dangerously lovely, and still more dangerously fascinating, as to have upset all his peace of mind at the very first meeting with her.

The end remained to be seen.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. LOGAN TELLS STORIES.

"A ministering angel."—*Sir Walter Scott.*

"At every word a reputation dies."—*Pope* (*'Rape of the Lock'*).

"When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffered. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange;
'Twas pitiful."—*Othello.*

"I SHOULD think she would come and see me to-day *at any rate*," said Max to himself, as, sitting upright on his very primitive trestle-bed, he gazed wearily from the whitewashed walls and bare red-brick floor of his room to the strip of glaring yellow sunlight obscured by flying clouds of dust visible through the half-inch of open doorway. "Some girls might have had the charity to give a look in yesterday or the day before at a poor devil of a fellow laid up with an infernal leg like mine in the same house with them; but perhaps she was shy, or that over-attentive hostess of mine wouldn't let her in while I was so feverish, and not able to get into my proper

togs. She must come to-day, however, if it's but for a minute, to see if I am alive; and I only wish I had my own room at the Court, or even that cosy little crib at New, to receive her in, and not a beast of a hole like this."

It had been the one consolation which Max had had to refresh himself with under the annoyance of being kept to his room with an aching, unhealed wound in his leg, no doctor within twenty miles, and none of the resources of refinement or civilisation within a hundred, that he would have Lil for his nurse. Hitherto she had been somewhat tantalisingly capricious and aggravating in her treatment of him—cold, indifferent, and satirical at most times, while at others (that, for instance, when he was being set on by the other men), she had suddenly melted into a delicious friendliness and sympathy, sweet enough to undo the effect of a month of frowns. That, however, was when he was well and strong, and master of himself in all things. It would be different now, he argued, judging from his remembrance of girls in English country-houses, whether as taken from real life or from sporting novels (the only ones he ever read). *They* were often cold and stand-off enough in the general way, "uncertain, coy, and hard to please"; but let "pain and sickness wring the brow," let their heroes come to grief in the hunting-field with a broken back or leg, and "*what*

ministering angels" did not they become! Why, the iciest and most conventional of damsels, one who would hardly allow the tips of her fingers to be squeezed in a waltz; and, far from spending the evening *tête-à-tête* with you on a verandah, could scarcely be beguiled out, by the sight of others doing the same, for ten minutes between the dances—even such a one would, in the novels afore-mentioned, sit for hours beside your bed if you were ill, performing all the offices of a sick-nurse with an exquisite tenderness and skill no sick-nurse ever possessed; would read to you (poetry, of course), sing to you heavenly melodies without piano accompaniment; and as your wearisome convalescence crept on, or you sank gently into an early grave, would hold your fevered fingers in hers, or suffer you to rest your languid head upon her bosom, while you murmured words of love and gratitude into an ear only too willing to listen.

Young Lorimer had grown quite impatient for the pretty idyl to commence.

But alas! there was no such treat in store for him. Lil Hardy thought nothing indeed of sitting out the whole evening in the moonlight with Max, or going for rides in the dewy morning with Mr. Nicholson, or sewing buttons on to Jack Logan's wristband as he sat beside her with his huge paw resting on her knee while she performed the

ceremony. Why should she? Those occult social laws of our enlightened country, which allow you to circle round and round a room by gaslight with a man's arm round your waist and your chin on his shoulder; or to sit squeezed up together for an hour by the clock in a dark corner on the staircase after supper; yet which would shriek in horror at the idea of your walking a dozen yards with him unchaperoned by the light of day, or bowing to him from a hansom-cab, or writing him letters, unless on the gravest cause, or that you have no one to do it for you, were mysteries which had no existence for Lil. If there had been no other woman on the estancia to nurse Max, or even no one equally willing and competent, she would have done it herself as a matter of course; and devoted all her spare time to his delectation with the best grace in the world. As it was, there was the lady of the house, who was not only perfectly able for the task, but who had expressed a very decided preference for it over any of the other duties which she had suggested to Lil for her occupation instead; and besides this, Max had been foolish enough to talk sentimentally to her when he was well—*the* one reason (according to Lil's *mœurs sociales*) sufficient for depriving him of the grace of her company (unless there was practical need for it) when he was ill!

So she saw to the meals and domestic comforts generally

of the other gentlemen, and even went so far as to make dainty broths and puddings for Max himself, seeing that the culinary skill of the *muchacha* in the kitchen was not equal to such niceties; but she left Mrs. Logan to take them in to him, to coax him to eat, and talk to him, or fan away the flies, while he did so; and even to carry out the artless programme he had designed for a very different person, by singing to him such new and refreshing melodies as, "Let me kiss him for his mother," or "Be kee—ind to your father," in a shrill falsetto voice indescribably irritating to his nerves; though scarcely perhaps worse than the reading aloud from an old volume of the 'Family Herald,' in which she indulged as an alternative delight, selecting (as Max long afterwards ungratefully declared) all the stories in which the letter *H* occurred most frequently, so that she might leave it out with the more effect.

And all the while he could hear the liquid tones of Lil's voice as she moved about the house, or sat talking with the others in the verandah, her soft laughter rippling out now and then among the coarse male cachinnations; could hear Meggy's voice calling out that "Miss Lil's horse was ready," when the day got cool enough for her ride; and even catch a glimpse once and again of her golden head as she passed his open door without ever glancing in.

If he had not been a gentleman he might almost have been tempted at such moments to throw a pillow at his hostess's shiny black curls, and implore her to leave him, and, since Lil would not come near him, not to return herself, or worry him any more.

As it was, though forcing sufficient outward appearance of gratitude for bare courtesy, he was moody, irritable, and fractious enough for ten invalids, and found it hard work to keep some show of temper ou of his voice as he begged his hostess not to take so much trouble for him. He was sure she must be tired out, and he really didn't want waiting on; especially when she had other guests to attend to as well.

"There is Miss Hardy, now," he said, angrily, conscious of a rise of colour as he uttered the name. "I am sure *she* must be wishing me at Jericho if you stay away from her all day to keep me company. If I could only see her—which, I suppose, wouldn't be proper while I'm lying here?—I should really like to assure her that it isn't my selfishness; but your —ahem!—your charity, that keeps you in this dull room, and leaves her in solitude."

"La, Mr. Lorimer!" said Mrs. Logan, bridling and laughing at the same time. (As she observed afterwards, it was quite touching the way that dear young fellow would only

think of *her* and her fatigue, when she could see he was biting his lips for pain all the while.) "Lil Hardy isn't lonely; don't think it! Why, she's got Logan and all the other fellows to amuse her, and for that matter would just as soon have me out of the way, I dare say. A girl don't have the chance every day of getting three or four men all to herself; and as for me, you needn't be afraid of my ever feeling dull or tired while I can be of use to you, after your injuring yourself in our service."

Max threw his head back irritably.

"My dear Mrs. Logan, if you only knew how many of your husband's sheep I injured in the same way beforehand, I think you'd pronounce the slice in my leg only a just *quid pro quo* for my services. Ask Mr. Peters——"

"Mr. Peters don't know anything about it, Mr. Lorimer; and as to medical names for things, he's just as ignorant as a pig, so it's not him I'd ask for them. I'm not in any way over fond of him; and to see the way he follows up Lil Hardy and tries to make himself agreeable to her—a man old enough to be her father!—is too ridiculous."

"To Miss Hardy!" cried Max, his face scarlet again, though this time with indignation. "A man in *his* position! What insufferable presumption! I don't wonder you are disgusted at it; but—but oughtn't you to be there now to

look after—I mean, may it not be difficult for a young lady, when as unprotected as she is, to repel——"

Mrs. Logan burst into a hearty laugh.

"La, Mr. Lorimer, what 'igh notions you do have, to be sure! Not but what *I* agree with them thoroughly" (correcting herself quickly, as she caught the expression on Max's face); "but then of course you and me naturally think alike, being English born and bred; and it isn't the thing for an English girl to go about anywhere unprotected. *I* never did, I know, and indeed I often say to Logan now: 'Don't talk of taking me in to Monte San Felipe with you, for the ways and the girls there are that strange and bold, a silly little woman like me—though I have been married all these years —feels like a mere child among them; but—*Carramba!* Mr. Peters is thought a deal of in these parts. He could buy Logan twice over if he wanted; and as to repelling him, I don't know that Lil Hardy has any mind to; though if she has she wouldn't want me to help her. You don't know what a spirit that girl has, for all she looks so soft. Why, the only other time she stayed with me, there was a man tried to kiss her, just for fun, you know; and she didn't say a word, or even call out, but just up with her whip (he was taking her down off her horse) and cut him right across the face with it that sharp he

dropped her like a shot. His face was marked for days afterwards."

"She—*Miss Hardy* did!" Max stammered; then as if striving to subdue his first, incredulous disgust at the incident: "But, after all, the hound thoroughly deserved it, and I only hope your husband 'marked him' even more thoroughly afterwards."

"Well, Logan did give him the rough side of his tongue pretty plain. He's very fond of Lil, you know, and so am I. We're like sisters indeed; but she's the oddest girl for all that. Why, there was another time, I remember. The men were all in the *comedor* drinking one evening after dinner, and we *couldn't* get them to come out. Logan had had quite as much as was good for him before Lil and I left the table; and I knew he'd a long, nasty ride on business next day, and that if he got regularly drunk overnight he wouldn't be fit for it; so I said to her at last, we'd slip in and turn the key in the cupboard where the spirits are kept, and make a bolt with it. She was up to it in a minute, and said she'd go first as not being likely to attract so much attention" (Max involuntarily opened his eyes); "but just as she'd got her hand on the cupboard-door, one of them saw what she was up to, and made a dash to get out another bottle of brandy before she shut it. She called out, and tried to pre-

vent him, and I ran in to the rescue; and there was a regular tussle, Logan as bad as any of 'em, pulling me down on to his knee, and calling to the boys to get out a jar of preserved fruits I had in the cupboard as well as the spirits; and they, only too glad of the fun, pelting Lil with the sugared cherries and things. It was just a regular romp—la, I can't help laughing to think of it; and one of them got hold of her and tried to stop her mouth with a plum; but she had got the key in her hand, and just jobbed it into his face so that he let go and stumbled back on the others; and if she didn't lock the door that instant and dash clean out of the room before any one could stop her. She flung the key down on to the middle of the floor in my bed-room, and rushed right out into the camp; nor we couldn't get her in or find her for ever so long; and then she crept in quietly somehow, and locked herself into her own room.—Why, Logan, is that you? When did you come in?"

"I hope you've come to take your wife away," cried Max, with almost savage gladness at the interruption. He felt as if he *could* not have listened to another word. "Do; there's a dear fellow. She—she's wearing herself out with looking after me; and I don't need it. Upon my soul it—it makes me miserable."

And Logan, more than guessing, from the expression of his

guest's face and his own experience of Carrie's "talks", that he was in earnest, complied, leaving Max to torment himself with vain queries as to whether it was possible that Lil—fragile, flower-like, gracious Lil—could be the sort of creature depicted in Mrs. Logan's artless narratives: flirting or romping hardily with half-a-dozen men one day, thrashing them with a riding-whip the next; and conducting herself generally like a cross between a barmaid and a pretty horse-breaker. And yet Mrs. Logan knew her better than he; it could hardly be an invention. He was so miserable with the thought of it that he scarcely spoke a word to any one for the rest of the afternoon; and the worst part of the business was, that he felt in his heart he had no right to be miserable about it at all. What *was* Lil to him?

Mr. Lorimer made his appearance in the sitting-room on the following day. His leg was still strapped up, and he could not use it for standing on; nay, Logan had told him bluntly that he had far better stay where he was for another day or so, and not run the risk of the bleeding breaking out again; but the young man was not to be persuaded. Another twenty-four hours of Mrs. Logan *ad nauseam* was more than he could endure; and taking advantage of her absence for the one duty which she could not relinquish, even for him—her mid-day siesta—he got up, dressed with some difficulty, and,

by the aid of a stick and any article of furniture that came handy, managed to half-hop, half-limp into the sala. It was half-darkened, and at first he thought no one was there; for it was the hour of siesta generally, and the whole house had that air of stillness and desertion which belongs to most South American habitations at that time; but as, supporting himself between the door and his stick, he slowly and awkwardly hobbled forward, some one rose hurriedly from a low American chair in the corner, and the voice which had so often tantalised him during the last three days, exclaimed in a tone of startled concern:

"Mr. Lorimer, is that you! I did not know you were allowed to be up. Ought you to have tried to leave your room by yourself?"

"Why not, when I am perfectly able to do so, and—you are here, Miss Hardy?" said Max lightly, all thoughts of her selfish inhumanity slipping away, and his eyes dancing at the happy chance of having found her there and alone; but at the complimentary speech Lil had already drawn back from her first hasty movement to greet him; and without even offering him her hand (though indeed that might be because both of his were occupied), answered him in the most indifferent tone:

"*Por cierto,* I don't know why, except that I did not know

you were able—that is all. I am glad to see you are so much recovered."

Deeply mortified at her change of tone, Max made a hasty movement to propel himself to the nearest seat; but unfortunately missed the chair grasped at, stumbled, dropped his stick, and would have fallen if Lil had not sprung forward and caught his arm, bidding him hold on to her while she helped him to the sofa. It was only half-a-dozen steps, but Max had turned as white as death, and was trembling all over ere he sat down; though not so much from the effect of the stumble, cruelly as it had jarred his wounded leg, as from the brief contact with that soft round shoulder under its muslin covering. It seemed to take away his breath for a moment, and Lil stood and looked at him anxiously.

"Mr. Lorimer, you have hurt yourself. Oh, do you call *this* being able to get about?" she said reproachfully. "Lean back at once, and put up your feet. What would Mr. Logan say! There!—is that more comfortable?"—as, having shaken up and arranged the pillow at the head of the sofa, she crossed the room for another, and tucked it deftly under his injured limb.

"More comfortable than I deserve to be," said Max gratefully, and striving to repress an unregenerate desire to detain and kiss those slim white hands, whose lightest touch was so

different from Mrs. Logan's. "I never meant, however, to give you all this trouble, Miss Hardy, and you do right to scold me, especially as you dislike nursing so much."

"Dislike nursing!" said Lil, looking unaffectedly surprised.

Max nodded reproachfully.

"So at least Mrs. Logan gave me to understand when I suggested to her that you—I mean when I told her I was afraid she would tire herself out by her exertions for me, and that if you——"

"I see!" Lil interrupted, laughing merrily, though with that slight touch of sarcasm in her mirth that Max had felt once before, and did not like;—"*you* thought that one nurse was not enough for you, and that I ought to volunteer for the service as well; and Mrs. Logan differed from you, and, being too amiable to say so, invented an excuse for me out of her own head. Are not you rather an *exigeant* person, Mr. Lorimer?"

"No, I am not," said Max sharply; "unless it be *exigeance* to be only too willing to dispense with half the attention one receives, supposing one could do so without rudeness or ingratitude. You have always been prejudiced against me, Miss Hardy, or else perhaps you wouldn't *see* everything I say in such an unfair light; but I give you my word that the reason I am in this room now is only because I

am anxious that no one should think I want a nurse any more, and because I cannot bear to feel myself a burden on the hands of those to whose hospitality I have no manner of right."

"But everybody has a right to hospitality in the camp," said Lil gently, and made to feel rather ashamed of herself by Max's passionate retort; "and I am quite sure neither Mr. nor Mrs. Logan feel you a burden at all. *She* is very fond of nursing—she says so."

The corners of Mr. Lorimer's mouth twitched.

"*Awfully* fond!" he said with unction: then forgetting his late displeasure in a new alarm: "If she were to know I had got up—but you don't think she'll find it out just yet awhile, do you? Please say you don't."

"Not till three o'clock, certainly. Her siesta generally lasts till then. But, Mr. Lorimer, wouldn't you like some lemonade? I made a fresh jug for you not an hour ago."

"For *me?* Did you really? Ah, then, you are kinder to me than you pretend," cried Max, his eyes lighting up on the instant.

Lil coloured slightly.

"Well, for you or any one else who happened to want it," she said indifferently. "Will you have some? The jug is standing there in the *saguan*[1] to keep cool."

[1] Entry.

"No, thank you; I wouldn't have you trouble yourself by getting it me for the world. You need not have snubbed me so sharply, however."

"I did not mean to snub you, Mr. Lorimer."

"Didn't you? You succeeded most admirably without the intention. However, I dare say I deserved it for my conceit. Heaven knows, you had never given me any warrant for it."

Lil said nothing. They were on the brink of another quarrel, and she felt it was as much her fault as his. To go away and leave him when he was so helpless, and possibly suffering, would have been cruel, so she retreated to her low chair again, and taking up a piece of work, went on with it without speaking. Max was silent also for a minute or two and lay watching her, admiring the soft outline of her cheek and chin, and the swift movements of her slender fingers, until his pettishness had all evaporated, and he exclaimed suddenly:

"Miss Hardy, I beg your pardon, I may be rude for saying it, but I *cannot* understand how you endure a life like this."

Lil looked up, the ready colour flushing her cheeks for a moment, but her lips grave.

"Does it seem so unendurable to *you* then?" she asked evasively.

"To me! I am a man; that makes it entirely different.

Men work out their lives in all sorts of places where women could not exist for a day."

"But many women exist in places like these very comfortably, and for many years," said Lil, surprised. "Mrs. Logan herself has lived here for nearly a dozen."

"Mrs. Logan is not *you*. If you were both in England you would not even associate with—ladies in her sphere. Surely you feel that."

"As I am not in England, however, but her guest and in her house, I don't think (do you?) that you ought to tell me so."

"No, by Jove! you're right; and I beg your (and her) pardon. But anyhow she is differently situated. This is her home, as you say, and it is her duty to stay in it under her husband's protection. You are only here by choice."

"By my father's choice," said Lil quickly, the wistful look which she could not always keep out of her eyes coming back to them with the thought of home and Liz and Louie. "He said that he thought the camp air would do me good, and so he sent me here."

"But your health is not delicate? You are quite strong now, are you not?"

"Oh, yes, I am quite strong now, Mr. Lorimer," said Lil trying to steady a quivering of the lip of which she was conscious. "If you ask me so many questions, I shall return

the compliment, and say I suppose you are not going to settle in the camp, since you dislike it so?"

"Well—I don't quite know," said Max, laughing. "You see I am like you in one respect. I was sent, not out here, but out of England, by my step-father; and not exactly for my health, but to get rid of me."

"Sent? But—need you have gone?" asked Lil, looking up at the handsome, dashing young fellow in some surprise. "You are a man, and your own master."

"My dear Miss Hardy, that last is just what I am not. My poor father, for some occult reason of his own (I can't resent it on personal grounds, as I was not born at the time), decided that his son was not likely to be capable of undertaking the rights and powers of a man till the somewhat advanced age of twenty-five; and as that wished-for term will not arrive for another six months, I am still in legal phrase an infant."

"Then you will go back to England in six months?"

"No; I am under promise not to do so. The fact is, what income I shall have of my own isn't large, and is further encumbered by a debt to this same old curmudgeon of a step-father, who hates me like poison; so the question is whether I had not better remain here long enough to make it more."

"By sheep-farming?"

"Well, yes. I heard such flaming accounts of it when I was at Nice last spring, that I thought I couldn't do better than try it for a time. Of course, I'm only looking about me at present" (Lil thought of Meggy), "and I can't say, looking at this leg of mine, that I've begun well so far; still just for a time— —"

"You will never make anything at sheep-farming *for a time*, Mr. Lorimer," said Lil decidedly; "and I don't believe *you* would make much at it at all. I do not think you would like it."

"Why not? Ah, you think me too fine a gentleman," said Max, hardly knowing whether to be flattered or offended at the supposition.

"Oh dear, no! That would be a reason the other way, for some of our best estancieros have been very fine gentlemen in England, younger sons of the aristocracy, University men, and used to every luxury at home."

"Then why shouldn't I, who am a University man also (we'll say nothing about the luxuries, for I've heard too much on that score from my guardian), do as well as they?"

"Because—I may be wrong of course—but I think where those men might not mind coarseness or deprivations for the

mere sake of change, or even for the fun of the thing, you would be jarred upon by them at every moment. You would be continually contrasting them with what you had been used to, and perhaps forgetting that what may be right and necessary in your own country, would never be thought of here; and then——"

"Well—then?"

"Well, sheep-farming and the natives—native shepherds and *employés* in general—want a tremendous deal of patience and tact—yes, tact and firmness too—in order to manage them successfully; and I think (please don't be offended)—but I can't help thinking you are a little too quick-tempered and impetuous to get on well with them."

"Do you tell me so to *try* my temper?" asked Max, striving to force a smile, though his colour had risen considerably. "You may with safety. I ought indeed to be obliged by your taking the trouble to waste so many thoughts upon me at all."

It was Lil's turn to blush now. She had been speaking with her old, natural simplicity, and more as imparting certain practical information than with any thought of how it might sound to the person concerned.

"One cannot help thinking a little about people with whom one is thrown," she said apologetically; "and there are so many young men who come out here meaning to do great

things, and go back having lost all they had, that we—my sister Lisbeth and I, I mean—often think it is a pity they do not know more about it all beforehand. I should be sorry if it were so with you; but I did not intend. . . . I mean, I am afraid I said what I should not have done all the same, Mr. Lorimer, and I dare say it sounded rude."

"Do I not tell you you may say anything you please to me?" said Max passionately. "It is only too good of you to care, to take an interest in the fortunes of a mere stranger, and such a graceless one as myself; and you may guess how I appreciate it when I tell you that if I were ruined, as you suggest, I do not know another woman in the world who would be charitable enough even to *say* she was sorry for me."

Lil looked up wonderingly. It seemed incredible to her that this good-looking young man, who looked such a spoilt child of fortune, with his glossy curls, delicate colouring (made more delicate by even a few days of illness), and imperious manners, could be as friendless as he described.

"Not your . . . your own family!" she said, a little incredulously.

"Family? I have none; unless you dignify that cross-grained step-father and guardian of mine by the name. My mother—bless her!—died four years ago; my father before I was born. Brother or sister of my own I never had; and

though I possess a half-sister, she has had the misfortune of late to become a saint, a *rôle* which unluckily for me isn't compatible with sisterly affection. We used to be very fond of one another when we were children, and *I* am as good friends with her as ever; but since my dear mother's death, she has (naturally perhaps) gone over to her father's side, and shunted me altogether. I haven't seen her except for a couple of days for nearly three years, and she wouldn't even bid me good-bye before I left England."

"Not bid you good-bye! But—but I can't understand such a thing," cried Lil, too shocked to realise what a delicious world of sympathy those blue eyes of hers were revealing to the person gazing into them. "Had you done anything very *bad* then? Oh! but you couldn't: not bad enough for *that*, at any rate."

Max laughed bitterly.

"Bad is no word for it," he said with mocking irony. "I had actually got into debt, and overstepped the niggardly allowance doled out to me from my own money by my miserly guardian; forgetting that the comfortable income which by every law of right ought to be mine, my own mother's fortune, was (thanks to her foolish marriage and more foolish generosity) stolen from the son she adored, and made over to a man who detested him. Oh, I sinned dreadfully, Miss Hardy. I

don't attempt to extenuate it, and, as you see, I am expiating my crime in banishment."

Lil's cheeks were lovely in their warm flame of indignation.

"But how—how wicked and unjust!" she exclaimed, forgetting in her natural impulsiveness both the possibility of there being another side to the story, and her previous prudent resolution of keeping Mr. Lorimer at a distance.

"What right have your step-father and his daughter to your mother's money? And even if the law gives them one, ought not they—she especially—to want to share it with you? Ah, father was right, I see, when he said once that the English people at home made a god of money, and cared for nothing so much. *I* should hate to live in such a place; and I think you ought to be glad to get away from it."

"Do you think I am not!" said Max, leaning towards her, his eyes glowing, his face pale with excitement. "*Glad!* Why, I would give all the money in the world, and everything else that men most value, for these five minutes, and those sweet, pitiful words from you. Thank you a——"

"Why, Mr. Lorimer, you don't mean to say you're in here, and I hunting high and low for news of you, and frightened half out of my life at not finding you in your room!" cried a sharp, staccato voice at the door, as Mrs. Logan, fresh from her siesta, and brave in afternoon attire, made her appear-

ance there, and brought Max's impetuous speech to a sudden termination. "However *could* you be so daring, and without even telling me first, so that I might have made up a comfortable couch for you here, and helped you in myself, if you were bent on it!"

"Thanks awfully; but there was no need to trouble you that way. Miss Hardy was kind enough to do the first, and I am more comfortable than I could have imagined it possible to be," said Max, with so much more petulance than gratitude that Mrs. Logan's little black eyes shot an angry glance at the young lady to whom he alluded.

"What, Lil, are *you* there with Mr. Lorimer!" she said, throwing an unpleasant suggestion of surprise into her tone. "Oh, if it was your doing, I mustn't scold him, for I know how irresistible young ladies like you are; but all the same he really *isn't* well enough for flirting and fooleries now, and Logan will be dreadfully vexed if his leg is worse to-night."

"My leg be—Miss Hardy, I—I *beg* your pardon," cried Max impetuously; but with one glance of grave reproach at him, and none at all at Mrs. Logan, Lil had very coolly and quietly walked out of the room; and what further transpired in her absence deponent sayeth not. The result of it was, however, that half an hour later her hostess sought her out, and with very red eyes begged her pardon.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE SCORE OF PROPRIETY.

"The chariest maid is prodigal enough,
If she unmask her beauty to the moon."
Hamlet, Act I. Scene i.

"A nice man is a man of nasty ideas."—*Swift.*

"One day we read together, with intent
Of pleasure, and without one evil thought,
Of Lancelot, and how his soul was rent
By love. We were alone."—*Dante* (' *The Inferno* ').

LIL granted the required forgiveness sweetly enough. It is difficult to be on bad terms with a lady who is not only your hostess, but the only female companion within reach of you, and from whom you cannot get away if you wish; but, on the other hand, it is hard *not* to be able to get away from women capable of speaking as Mrs. Logan did when put out; and there was a sadness in her face and a longing for home and her sisters in her heart, which lasted for long after Mrs. Logan had dried her eyes and resumed her normal high spirits.

For another thing, Lil was vexed with herself, and therefore, perhaps, more ready to feel sore when others were vexed with her. *Why* was it that she and Mr. Lorimer could not be half an hour together without being on the verge of either quarrelling or love-making half a dozen times? It was not so with others; and yet he was the one person with whom it was peculiarly disagreeable to her to feel that it should be the case. That foolish bet of his prior to their first meeting, and making all association between them more or less embarrassing from the attention it had attracted to her, his passionate disposition and open admiration for herself, and Mrs. Logan's perpetual and vulgar adulation of his good looks and patrician bearing, had all determined her on being more than ordinarily particular in her relations with him, and made her nervously ashamed, lest her impulsive championship of him in the shearing quarrel, and her hysterical attack after his accident, should have been attributed by others to any special liking or tenderness for the young man.

It was for this reason that she had so carefully avoided putting herself forward unnecessarily in his service, and had even refrained from such expressions of sympathy for him as would have come naturally to her under any other circumstances: resolving to treat him in all things with the same civil indifference which she would have shown to any un-

interesting Spaniard or stranger who had turned up at the estancia for a night's lodging. And yet, with all this, and within twenty minutes of their first meeting after his injury, he had twice nearly quarrelled with her, and then had betrayed her into such warm kinship and sympathy with him, as would in another moment have led to something much more tender and passionate than a mere expression of gratitude from the object of her pity, if Mrs. Logan's entrance had not by good fortune nipped it in the bud.

Lil could have stamped her foot with annoyance at herself. It seemed to her as if she never now could do as she wished, or as was natural to her, without the fear of having either the action itself, or the motive for it, misconstrued. A little time ago it would not have been so. In the old days she never even thought of what others might think or say, but just did as the impulse moved her, simply and naturally, and if (as sometimes happened) the action did not turn out well, if she found herself seemingly more prudish than her sisters, or, contrariwise, accused of being a shocking flirt by one of the Miss Beauchamps, her natural light-heartedness put the matter by as one of no account, and she speedily forgot it for more pleasant subjects of thought.

It was Lieutenant Melville's death and James Carnegie's brutal attack on her which had shattered all this, and left

her so shaken, beaten down, and crushed, that for the time being she became morally incapable of making a just appreciation of her own actions and the responsibility attaching to them, and even now this was apparent in the apparent inconsistency of so many of her words and actions, and the increased sensitiveness to blame and self-diffidence, which had replaced the happy, single-minded irresponsibility of earlier years.

Lorimer did not see her again that day till quite late in the evening, and sorely aggrieved he felt in consequence: more especially when, after dinner (a meal of which he partook in solitude, his leg not being well enough for him to go into the *comedor*), he found that Lil had gone for her customary ride with Messrs Peters and Nicholson, Mrs. Logan preferring to stay at home and enjoy a nap in the verandah, while her husband pulled out the cribbage-table and challenged his invalid guest to a game. The riding party did not return till some time after dark, their gay voices sounding their approach beforehand as they cantered up to the house; and then, in honour of Lorimer's inability to move, pipes, brandy-and-water and cards were brought into the sala, and *vingt-et-un* began; Lil, according to prior arrangement (and so as not to seem unsociable), making one of the party, and making believe in the most amiable way to be no more affected by tobacco fumes than any of the others. Had she done otherwise there

was not one there who would not have foregone his beloved smoke with the greatest alacrity; but Lil knew that Mrs. Logan never minded it in the least, and that her good-natured husband was utterly miserable without his pipe; and the result of her presence told most beneficially both in modifying the strength and quantity of the potations, and toning down the conversation over the card-table to a much more subdued key than was generally the case.

Max, however, was unspeakably shocked and disgusted at the whole proceeding. That Lil should have gone out riding with two unmarried men like Peters and Nicholson after her previous experience — *selon* Mrs. Logan — of the liberties they might allow themselves on such occasions, was bad enough in his estimation, he having been under the belief previously that either his host or Mrs. Logan always played chaperon on those excursions. He even took on himself to hint to Logan at the unsuitability of the present proceeding; but, fortunately for himself, with sufficient delicacy to prevent the meaning of his suggestion from arriving anywhere near the brain of the worthy estanciero, who answered carelessly:

"Oh, the women here always ride out before breakfast or after dinner. Best time for them—cooler, you know. Want *me?* Bless you, man, no. She's got Nicholson and Peters to look after her, and I'd just as lief stay and have a hand

with you. Two men are enough to take care of one girl —even Lil—and I guess they'd tell you so."

Max gave him up as impracticable.

But when Lil made her appearance afterwards in the middle of the smoking, drinking, and card-playing party, looking fresher and more charming than ever in her soft muslins and dainty ribbons, and lending the attraction of her sweet voice and sunny smiles to the entertainment, without any shadow of feminine repugnance or embarrassment, young Lorimer's brow grew gloomier than ever. Like most men who have been rather wild themselves, and taken the first plunge into life with a loose rein, he held ultra-strict ideas as to feminine proprieties, and the conduct of women in his own class generally. The unprofessional fast girl he detested; and that sort in particular which one meets most frequently in country houses, and which affects stable slang, wears horse-shoe pins, and haunts the billiard-room in pursuit of congenial male flirtees, was far more offensive to him than the poor little painted drab with hollow cheeks and bistred eyes who laid a coaxing hand on his coat-sleeve as he left the theatre at night. He could at any rate understand the *raison d'être* of the latter. That Lil, however, a girl so exquisite in some respects that only that day he had been near throwing himself at her feet, and beseeching her to marry him and bear the honour of

his name—that *she* should lower herself to the level of that other sort of young woman, and make herself as cheap as the latter did, was inexpressibly aggravating and disgusting to him; and he began to feel as thankful for Mrs. Logan's intervention in the afternoon as he had been furious at the time.

"Thank you, no. Certainly not before ladies," he said, pushing away the box of cigars when proffered to him with such unmistakable emphasis and intent that Peters stared at him with lifted eyebrows, and then observed in a tone of somewhat angry self-defence:

"You needn't trouble yourself to be so squeamish, Mr. Lorimer. My friend, Mrs. Logan, ain't here at present, and wouldn't mind a bit of smoke if she were; and Miss Hardy don't either; she says so—don't you?" appealing to Lil with a confident smile. Lil's pleasant one as she turned round to him showed in advance what her answer would be; but Max did not wish to wait for it.

"Thank you, Mr. Peters," he said with considerable hauteur, "but *I* have always been in the habit of being squeamish for ladies, whether they are so for themselves or not. It is I who mind smoking at present."

Whereupon Mr. Peters muttered in an excusably audible aside to Meggy, that "of all the insufferable young prigs, he *never*"——and Max wondered to himself with rising wrath

whether "that fellow" had figured in the "tussle" for the key of the spirit-cupboard which Mrs. Logan had so graphically described to him. He shuddered visibly at the thought of it, and again thanked heaven for his escape of the afternoon. Yet who could have thought that the gentle girl whose eyes had been turned on him with such womanly softness then was the Mænad-like heroine of the romp above-mentioned! Lil had coloured like a rose. She did not speak or even look up from the cards she was holding during the few words between the two men; but when she went to her room that night she wondered vainly within herself why they should both have looked so angry, and more especially what had put Max out. It was very ungrateful of him to be cross when the desecration of the sala into a smoking-room, and her consent to it, had been conceded out of consideration and kindness for him; but that he *was* cross there could be no doubting, and with her too, for he hardly spoke to her the whole evening, and only in the most frigid and formal manner. Surely, *surely* he could not have believed Mrs. Logan's pettish insinuation that afternoon of her readiness to flirt with him; he who knew that she had nothing to do with his coming into the sala and finding her there. If he *did*—— but a sudden recollection of the fact that Mrs. Logan had let out very clearly that her apology was at his instigation,

checked that thought, and calmed the young lady's pulses. She went to bed at last with one idea prominent in her mind —that if a letter did not come from her father authorising her return to town with Mr. Logan when he went up to dispose of his wool in the week following, she should take the consent she had asked for as granted, and start without it.

As it happened, Mr. Peters was the first to leave the estancia. He departed the very next day: and Max Lorimer was put into such good-humour thereat that he came out in quite a new light, and surprised everybody by his gaiety, wit, and agreeableness. Even when his face was white and drawn with the pain of his wounded leg, which showed signs of gathering and was certainly no better for the wrench he had given it on the previous day, he made light of it; would not allow himself to be pitied, and even offered some sort of apology to Logan for his last night's crustiness by speaking of himself as a bear with a sore head, "bad to find, and hard to bind," while his manner to Mrs. Logan was full of a half-playful and half-triumphant sauciness which fascinated that good lady more than ever, and yet puzzled her withal.

She never guessed that it was all owing to some scraps of a conversation between her and Lil, held somewhat imprudently near to the door of his apartment that very morning, and of which this was the sum—

"*Lil!* You don't mean to say you've gone and refused Peters!"

Lil (in a startled tone): "Hush! No, I don't. I'm not saying a word. What do you mean?"

"You know very well what I mean; and you *have*. Now don't deny it, for I tell you frankly it's no use."

"If he has told you, of course I shall not deny it; but I do wonder at his doing so."

"He didn't tell me: at least he let out to John he was going to ask you; and I know he would never have gone off this way if you hadn't re——"

"Oh, hush! do, pray, some one will hear you; and there is surely no need for every one to know it."

"But, Lil, why *did* you?"

"Why did I what?"

"You know—refuse him."

"Because he obliged me to do so, by asking anything so absurd. I am sorry your husband knew, for I think he might have stopped him beforehand, and saved me the annoyance, that's all."

"La, Lil, one would think you didn't like to be made love to! What are girls for?"

"Not for that, or for Mr. Peters, certainly, if they are girls like me."

"But, my dear girl, he's awfully well off. There ain't such an estancia as his within fifty leagues; I've been there, and you live on the fat of the land. Besides, I don't doubt he'd think nothing of a trip to Europe if you liked it."

"Dear Mrs. Logan, don't talk that way or I shall be cross. Surely you know me better than to believe——"

"But, Lil——"

"But, my dear friend, I won't let you go on. Do you know how loud you speak? Some one will hear you."

"Pshaw! What if they did! Logan knows already, and I don't doubt the others will guess. They must ha' seen it coming."

"Do you mean to say *you* did?"

"Why, of course. I even said so to Mr. Lorimer. It was plain enough. Come now, didn't you guess it yourself?"

A pause; and then, in a much lower tone, difficult to hear, but strongly indicative of disgust:

"*I?* If I had ever dreamt or suspected such a thing, do you think I would have allowed the man . . . . Oh! I am disappointed in you. I *thought* you and your husband cared more . . . thought more of me. To couple my name with a person like . . . Please never to speak to me on the subject again."

That was all; a rustle of draperies, the click of a door opened and shut, the pit-pat of footsteps retreating across the patio, and Max lay on his couch holding his aching leg between his hands, and with a face transfigured with delight and triumph.

"Mrs. Logan was wrong all the time! I might have felt it. What could *she* know about a girl like Lil Hardy! As if it was likely that beautiful angel would ever suspect a low cad like him of presuming to think of her! And she didn't. She said so. It's only her innocence makes her give rise to such insulting suspicions: and this will be a lesson to her. I hope it will teach her to keep men like that at a greater distance in future; but—by George! didn't she put down the other woman."

Max was in high spirits. He had quite forgotten the enormity of Lil's conduct on the previous evening; nor did the thought occur to him to ask himself—as he had done once before—what either the girl herself, or her behaviour, had to do with him. And yet, even before night, she again gave him cause to complain of it, and he went to rest in no more friendly spirit with her than the day before.

He had brought a little pocket volume of Tennyson's poems with him, and had been reading aloud from it to the two ladies that afternoon; but after a time Mrs. Logan slipped

away to attend to something else, bidding Max go on without minding her, "for it never made any difference in poetry where you left off or began"; and the young man took her at her word. He was at that age when an unappreciative listener is infinitely more trying than none at all.

Lil, on the other hand, sat listening in great and unaffected delight. One of Lorimer's strongest points, as I have said, was his voice. It was extremely clear, flexible, and cultured; and as perhaps a young man never reads better than when discoursing passionate poetry to a girl he is more than half in love with already, it is little wonder that Lil, who had hardly ever had a similar pleasure, and had never heard a play or a recitation in her life, felt her pulses thrill and her cheeks flush and pale, as she leant forward listening with shining eyes fixed upon the reader, and hands idly dropped upon her forgotten work, while Max slowly and softly repeated:

> "A man had given all other bliss,
> And all his worldly wealth for this,
> To waste his whole soul in one kiss
> Upon those perfect lips"—

or those other lines on the same theme:

> "Dear as remembered kisses after death;
> And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
> On lips that are for others: deep as love,
> Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
> Oh Death in Life! the days that are no more!

He paused: but Lil never noticed it. She was not thinking of him or of herself. She had forgotten time and place and everything else, in the fascination of the hour that held her chained and absorbed as a little child beneath the spell of some enchanting fairy tale. Even the room itself, the whitewashed walls, gaudy, frayed carpet and shabby furniture, seemed to have melted away into that classic grove of "sweet girl graduates" and "prudes for doctors". She only saw the one bar of light which pierced the half-closed shutters, and out of it Max's pale, clear cut face and passionate eyes shining on her with a kind of luminous intensity like some dream vision, beautiful but unreal, and part of the other dream. He himself was far less absorbed, indeed at times he could hardly go on with his reading for delight of watching his listener; yet dreaded to stop lest the silence should startle her, and break the charm which held her, Francesca-like, "with intent of pleasure and without one evil thought", a willing prisoner to his voice. And *what* a prisoner! How lovely and exquisite she was!—more exquisitely lovely than he had ever thought her before, even in that moment of their first meeting under the willow tree. And what a triumph, to have won and held her as he was holding her now, by the mere power of speech that "lent to the charm of the poet the music of his voice". His heart beat high with a sort of dizzy

rapture as he thought of it; and yet there was pain in the rapture, too—pain of a sort which Lil could not have understood had he uttered it: born of the fruit of that Tree of Knowledge of which young men eat and spoil all future feasts thereby: such questions as, Was she *his* captive even now, or that of memories of past days evolved by the words he was reading? Were there no horrible thoughts of "other lips" profaning the parted purity of hers: no remembrance of "first loves wilder by regret" to inspire those liquid eyes and pale, pathetic brow? She was so fair, so wonderfully fair, it was quite impossible that she should not have been loved, not once but often and often before; and if loved, why should she not have loved again? All men were not like Peters: and the absolute freedom of her intercourse with them—he loathed the thought as it came into his mind, and loathed himself for suffering it there; and yet, and yet with his experience of life and women how could he help it? But, after all, that experience had in truth been very limited, and was of just the nature to make him least capable of judging or understanding a girl like Lil: his acquaintance (when at all intimate) with women having been almost entirely confined to two classes: the severely strict and saintly, to which his mother and sister belonged, and the light-lived daughters of the *demi-monde*, from whose meshes he had been extricated with so much difficulty a year and a

half ago. That Lil did not belong to the former was but too evident. He shuddered to think what his mother would have thought, she who was so ultra-refined and particular, so scrupulously delicate and prudent even to timidity in her own conduct, had she been a witness to Lil's ways and habits; and the young man dearly loved his mother, and never in his saner hours had even contemplated bringing home a wife who could not have sat at her feet, and walked hand in hand with his sister, a worthy chatelaine of the old Berkshire home.

But even those other women, those loud-voiced, painted —(he had more than once noticed that Lil powdered, and wondered at her doing so, fair as she was),—slang-talking, cigarette-smoking girls, whose existence was almost a sealed book to the dear ones at home; who let him drive them to Ascot, and got bracelets and supper-parties out of him, were scarcely as untrammelled by any apparent laws of conventionality as was Lil: would scarcely and single-handed have given themselves over to the undivided society of the set of rough, hard-living men with whom she so freely consorted. And who could tell so well as he how apt men were to take advantage of the slightest privilege or laxity beyond those conceded to them by the laws of society! His soul sickened within him as he recalled yesterday evening's symposium, and

the anecdotes with which Mrs. Logan had regaled him at his bedside: but in the same moment his eyes, wandering from the book, fell on Lil's slender form and candid, virginal brows, as she sat leaning forward and listening with the same simple trustfulness and enjoyment, as though he were her father, and there were no such things as evil, or fast men with fast thoughts, in the world. Looking at her thus, he knew that he at any rate would have died rather than harm her; and if he, why not others? Ignorant she might be, imprudent perhaps, and ill-taught; but pure and innocent none the less; and perhaps only wanting a guiding hand, a — a friend to lead and mould her. Why, at this very moment, if he were to speak, to lay aside the book, and taking that soft white hand, say——

"Oh, here you are, Miss Hardy!" said Nicholson, putting in his head at the door. "What do you say to a twenty minutes' canter before dinner? It will be late to-day, for Logan and Meggy have gone off to Gregorio's *puesto* to talk about the wool *carretas*,[1] and the sun has gone in behind a cloud bank, so it's as cool as nine-pins. Come along, I've saddled your horse already; and there's something I want to show you all by yourself."

"To show me?" repeated Lil, a little blankly. This sudden

[1] Waggons.

recall to the ordinary things of life had roused her with some thing of a shock from the beautiful ideal world through which Max had been leading her; and she blushed vividly at the realisation of how late it was, and how long a time had passed since she had heard or thought of anything but the rhymed legend and the voice which read it. She stood up hastily.

"But—you are not going, *surely!*" said Max. He too had turned red, but with indignation. It was annoying enough to be interrupted at all at such a moment; but even that feeling was swallowed up in anger at Nicholson's presumption, and Lil's apparent readiness to yield to it. How dared he ask her to go out for a ride alone with him, he who had never seen her till a week or so back, and when even Peters was away; and Logan and Meggy, as he had expressly stated, gone off in another direction? And she—was it possible that after the lesson she had had that very morning — she could entertain the idea for a moment?

"Don't you be selfish, my dear fellow," said Nicholson good-humouredly. "You've had more than your share of Miss Hardy already; and if you're greedy enough to want more you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Be hanged, if I don't begin to believe that leg's a made-up business to secure the ladies' attention; but come along, Miss Hardy, do, or it

will be too late to show you my sight, and I think it's pretty enough to earn one of your nicest 'thank-yous' for."

"Very well, I'll come," said Lil, smiling as pleasantly as though in her heart she would not much rather have gone on listening to the 'Princess'. "But if you are to be thanked afterwards, your friend should be now, for it is I who have been selfish in letting him read so long, and forgetting all about his leg. Thank you *very* much, Mr. Lorimer, for the pleasure you have given me."

To any other man she might have said the simple truth, that it was almost the greatest she had ever known; but even as it was, her gratitude was spoken in the sweetest way, and with such a glistening in the blue eyes, as a man must have been hard indeed to withstand; but Max steeled his heart against the sweetness, and did not even look at her as he said with a stiff coldness which brought the blood to her cheek:

"Pray don't delay yourself to thank *me*, Miss Hardy. I assure you I am as much flattered by your allowing me to read to you here as Nicholson ought to be at being permitted to secure a *tête-à-tête* on horseback." He had to bite his lips to keep himself from saying more; and what right indeed had he to say anything, however disappointed in her he might be! But Lil's sensitive ear read easily enough the

mingled irony and displeasure in his tone; and as usual it set her wondering *what* she had done that was wrong. He could not surely be silly enough to be jealous, and of Mr. Nicholson, for with one or other or all of the party she rode out every evening as a matter of course; and to go on reading aloud, with a face whose pallor and rigidity she attributed to the pain of his festered leg, could not be so pleasant as to make him selfishly anxious to prolong it. Perhaps her rising had been too hasty, and had offended him; but surely she had expressed her gratitude warmly enough afterwards. Oh! it was a pity, he *could* be so nice, nicer and nearer to her in some ways than any one there. Only that afternoon, as he lay reading to her, she had thought how pleasant it might be if they could grow to be such friends as she and —that other one would have been; but it was no use, he was too changeable, and she should never understand him enough for that.

The poor girl went for her ride with a strange weight and trouble on her spirits which quite took away from her usual bright cheerfulness; and which even the promised sight—a flock of young ostriches feeding quietly in a hollow of the plain some two miles off—failed entirely to dispel.

CHAPTER IX.

NOT YET FORGIVEN!

"Her father's latest word hummed in her ear,
Being so very wilful you must go?"—*Lancelot and Elaine.*

"A raconter ses maux souvent on les soulage."—*Corneille.*

"Save, save, oh! save me from the candid friend!"—*Canning.*

THE morrow was a day of no little excitement at the estancia; for it brought with it a *chasqui*[1] laden with letters for nearly every one in the house, English and Spanish newspapers, magazines, and reviews; not to speak of no end of verbal gossip from the outside world, delivered between mouthfuls of food and drink, as the bearer sat at one end of the long table in the *comedor*, partaking of the refreshments which had been set before him, and answering the eager questions of the gentlemen who lounged or sat about him. Meggy was the only one of the party who had no correspondence, and expected none. He had long since died out of the world to which he had once belonged; and was

[1] Post-boy.

indeed reckoned as actually dead in one quiet Welsh village where a grey-haired widow lady of small means still talked of the promising son who went away so long ago to make a fortune for himself and her; and whose unrecorded death had made so terrible a blank in her lonely life; but even Max had a letter from his friend the vice-consul at Buenos Ayres; and among the others was that long-expected missive from Mr. Hardy in answer to Lil's entreaty to be allowed to return home.

She had come into the room with the rest, and recognised the well-known writing even before Mr. Logan had time to select it from the rest of the heap and give it to her; but she did not speak, her excitement at the sight of it was too great; and as soon as it was in her hand she turned and fled from the room, feeling as if she could not even bear to break the seal under the eye of those who would see either the joy or distress which the contents must bring to her.

Max was the only one, however, who noticed her departure, the rest being too busy exchanging a brisk volley of question and comment over their various budgets of news; but he had chanced to be looking at her when her eyes first rested on her father's letter, had marked how she turned from red to white during the moment of delay before it was given her; and

how, after holding it for a moment in a hand which trembled almost too much to retain it, she beat a hasty retreat without even waiting to see if there was anything else for her. It was not a pleasant sight to him, for it effectually distracted him from the enjoyment of his own correspondence by vain speculations as to who the letter could be from which had caused such lively emotion to the girl who unfortunately took up too much of his thoughts already.

She had evidently been expecting it. He could read that in the expression of her face, as also that it was too dear, or of too much import, to be opened before the rest of the company; and his heart went sick with a pang of jealousy as keen as it was absurd, at the idea that this was some lover's letter, and that the girl's very freedom of conduct and general sangfroid with regard to the male *habitués* of Casa Blanca might be occasioned by the fact of her being safely engaged to some one at a distance of whom they had never even heard. Yet, if so, Mrs. Logan, too, did not know of it; and for a couple of women to live in the same house on the intimate terms on which they were, and not confide in each other, seemed to him incredible save on the one supposition that it was a love affair to be ashamed of; and—and what the deuce, after all, was that to him, or why need he go troubling his head with such speculations about her and

her affairs? He was not in love with her himself, was he? Not *yet*!

Lil in the mean time had taken refuge in the sala, partly because her own room was undergoing the process of being scrubbed out, and partly because the former apartment was always deserted at that time of day. Her fingers were still trembling with excitement as she tore open the envelope and unfolded the letter; but the next moment a cry of bitter disappointment and grief broke from her, and her head was bowed over the page on which the tears rained down so fast she could hardly see to read the words which caused them. This is what they were:

"MY DEAR LIL,

"Your letter should have been answered sooner, but that I have, as you are aware, very little time for any but necessary correspondence. I write now to inform you that I am sailing for Europe on this day week on business which may detain me there from six to eight weeks. I expect to be back here, therefore, in four months from now; and this being the case I consider that you had much better remain where you are till my return. Lisbeth is old enough, and has, I think, sufficient good sense to take care of herself and of her younger sister; but she could not be expected to be answerable for you into the bargain; and your lamentable vagaries and imprudences have (as I need not pain you by a more explicit reminder) been such as to indispose me to run

the risk of your getting into fresh trouble at home when I am not there to be a check on you. As to what you say with regard to trespassing on the Logans' hospitality, I may tell you that with your letter I received one from Mrs. Logan urging me *not* to take you away from her yet, and enlarging in a very gratifying manner both on the comfort your society is to her, and on the improvement which has taken place in your health and spirits since you have had the benefit of camp air and exercise. Now here, thanks to the prevailing drought, the summer seems likely to be a very unhealthy one, and there has even been some talk of cholera cases (though hushed up as much as possible) among the low streets near the Mercado. Your constitution, not being as strong as your sisters', would make you particularly liable to infection; and I therefore hope that you will resign yourself cheerfully to remaining in your present home till my return in February, when, if possible, I will myself make a journey into the camp to fetch you back. Your sisters desire their love, and Liz encloses a note to you. With kind regards to my good friends the Logans, I remain,

"Your affectionate father,

"PAUL HARDY."

Lil had read the first page of the letter, containing the announcement of Mr. Hardy's projected journey, with almost breathless haste and excitement, mingled with no little astonishment at the news; for though many of the richer merchants in Monte San Felipe sent their sons to Europe to be educated, and thought little of paying a visit

there themselves from time to time, there had never been any allusion to the possibility of Mr. Hardy's doing so during all the years of Lil's young life, or even to that prospect (which most English families abroad keep steadily before them) of "going home" when he had amassed enough money to enable him to do so. It was only part of his general character, however, that now when he had resolved on the voyage he should make it known thus abruptly, and with no more explanation even to his own children than that given in the letter; but though Lil had sufficient filial affection to wish that she could have kissed him and said good-bye before he started on such a long and perilous journey, the vision of four months of home life with only Liz and Loo, unchilled by the silent repression of their father's presence, unterrified by the dread of fresh overtures from Pedro Sanchez, with old Juana grinning affectionately at her with every wrinkle of her kind black face, and Miss Petrona and Carmelita popping in and out, flirting their big black fans, and twittering innocent small talk, too amiable to be called gossip, formed a prospect delightful enough to set her pulses bounding in anticipation; and the shock of finding that none of it was in store for her; that she was not to return home at all during her father's absence, came upon her with overwhelming vehemence. At first, indeed, she could not—

would not believe it; but, through the blinding tears which sprang from her eyes, read and re-read the cruel words which, with no tender or softening touch, meted out her prolonged exile; and then, convinced at last of the reality of the sentence, but with no thought of rebelling against or evading it, let the letter slip from her fingers to the floor, and, hiding her face in the sofa cushions, gave herself up to a fit of almost childish weeping.

A noise in the room startled her. Some one had opened the door and come in, though unheard by her in consequence of her own passionate sobs; and it was only the intruder's awkward pause and attempt to depart, on discovering her presence, which caught her attention and compelled her to look up. Then she saw that Max Lorimer was standing midway between her and the door, half-turned indeed, as if to go away as fast as his crutch would allow him, but gazing at her the while with an expression of such shocked distress as almost quieted her own grief.

In truth it was only what he felt. He had not at all forgiven Lil for her conduct the day before yesterday. Nay, though treating her with every exactness of courtesy which formality could demand when they met, he had avoided her as much as possible ever since, and, in fact, made up his mind that since she was nothing, and could be nothing, to

him, it would be wiser for him to keep out of reach of that perilous fascination which, in common with most other men, he experienced in her society.

But all this went out of his mind at the sight of the girl in question, crushed down with face hidden upon the sofa, crying so bitterly, and with such passionate sobs, that but for the awkwardness induced by his wounded leg, he might have come and gone without her hearing him, or lifting that pale, tear-stained face and swollen eyes, so different from the bright and gracious one which he had hitherto known, that he could only look at her in pitying dismay, and stammer out:

"Miss Hardy, I am so sorry—I'm afraid you have had bad news. Indeed, I beg your pardon, but I had no idea you were here. May I—would you like me to call Mrs. Logan?"

But Lil put out a hand quickly as if in terror at the idea.

"Oh! no, please, not for anything! I . . I am very silly, but—but please shut the door. No, don't go away for a moment . . till I have asked you . . ."

"Ask me anything," said Max, coming nearer, and touched to the soul by the sobs which would quiver up that fair throat between each word, and choke her utterance. "There is nothing I would not do for you if I might;" and indeed for the moment he was so much in earnest, that if the

request had been to start off then and there and bring to her feet the misbehaving lover, whose vile letter had been (as he guessed) the cause of all this woe, he would have done it without a word. Lil's poor pale face flushed all over.

"Oh, thank you," she said; "but it is only not to tell . . not to say anything to the Logans, or . . or any one, of this. They would think it so strange and ungrateful of me, and, indeed, I know it is very weak and childish; but I was so disappointed, I had hoped so much to . . to be at home again in a few weeks more at most, that when I heard——"

"When you heard—what?" asked Max gently, and venturing to touch her hand, for she had nearly broken down again, and the tears were running over her cheeks as she glanced downward at the cruel letter which had conveyed her sentence of banishment. "Dear Miss Hardy, don't grieve so. See, let me open this window so as to give you a little air. There now! And of course I will keep your confidence, any confidence, if you will tell me what it is. You say——"

"I am to stay here!" said Lil, too much touched by the kindness of his tone for reticence, and fixing her drowned blue eyes on the grieved compassion of his, "four whole long months more; and I have been here nearly nine already, and I am so longing and *longing* to go home and see them

all. It will be more than a year—think of that—a year! since I have even spoken to my sisters; and oh! *you* must know what that is to me, for you have a sister too, and you said you loved her, though she had not been kind to you; but Liz and Louie were never unkind to me—never; and now we shall not see each other for the whole summer through; not for another four months, and *he* away in Europe too. Oh! it does seem hard."

"Who is 'he'?" asked Max softly, though the question gave him a pang, and he turned away his face to avoid seeing hers as she answered.

Lil's reply was most consoling.

"Why, papa, of course! Didn't I tell you he sent me here? And I had stayed *so* long already, I had written and begged so hard to be let come back—oh! you won't tell Mr. Logan, I should not like him to feel hurt—that I never thought he would refuse; and when he is going away himself, too."

It is hard to say whether Max felt most comforted or compunctious. That all this innocent grief should be that of a girl crying for her sisters; that the letter which had caused him so many evil doubts and harassing thoughts should be from her own father, put Lil herself in such a new and tender light before him, that he could have kissed her feet, at the same time that he cursed himself for his impertinent fancies.

"Poor, loving little darling!" he thought. "What a brute I must be not to have remembered how young and simple she is." Aloud he only asked in the same gentle tone as before: "But what makes your father so hard? Is he not fond of you? No—how could he help being that! But what reason can he have for refusing so natural a request?"

Lil coloured violently.

"He says—he talks about my health," she said confusedly; "but—but I don't think it is really that. I think he has not yet forgiven me."

"Forgiven you! What for? Oh, I beg your pardon; but what could *you* do to need forgiveness?"

"It was something I would not do, something he wished." Lil was still very much confused, but did not see how to get out of answering, especially when the question was put so impetuously. "He had set his heart on it; but"—paling a little, and shivering—"I *could* not do it; and so he was angry, and sent me away; at least, he said he thought it would be better for me to come here; and—and I thought so too then."

"I suppose he wanted you to marry some one you didn't like?" said Max, turning rather pale himself, and speaking very low.

Lil looked up at him in surprise.

"Yes; how did you know? But indeed I could not; it was not wilfulness, it was——but I cannot tell you about it. Please don't ask me."

"I never dreamt of being so impertinent. I only ask you to forgive me for being bold enough to say how right I think you were. No one should attempt to force another into marriage. You would have been far more miserable than you are now if you had given in to your father against the promptings of your own heart. Don't you feel that, yourself?"

"Indeed, I do; but still it is hard not to be forgiven even yet."

"It is cruelly hard, and unjust too," said Max warmly, and sending a vigorous curse (in spirit) after the absent Mr. Hardy.

Lil sighed deeply. She had dried her tears; but her disappointment was still too recent to be easily appeased.

"And I do think it was partly owing to Mrs. Logan," she said after a moment. "He says she wrote to him by the same post, urging him not to take me away. That sounds kind, and—and I don't want to think it anything else; but she never said a word about it to me; and she knew I was *wearying* to be at home

The expression, and the wistful, far-off look in Lil's eyes

struck Max with a sudden pang of something like mortification. He said, in a tone much less tender than before:

"Perhaps you mistake, and she did *not* know it. You concealed your feelings very well—out of kindness, I suppose; for I must own that even I never guessed you were unhappy here."

Lil looked up at him quickly.

"Did you not? I'm so glad. It is horrible to seem so rude and ungrateful as to be only longing to get away from people who are always kind and hospitable to you. Oh yes, I did try to hide it."

"And succeeded so well that you probably helped to bring about a prolongation of your exile," said Max more coldly, and with the sense of mortification so growing on him that he withdrew his hand from further contact with the little trembling one which, not daring to clasp, he had derived strange thrills of pleasure from even touching with his own as it lay on the sofa between them. "If you had showed us —the Logans and all of us—how much we all bored and wearied you, we might have felt a little humiliated; but no one, not even Mrs. Logan, could have tried to detain you any longer."

"But you did nothing of the sort," cried Lil, her sensitive colour rising in quick self-rebuke of the impression she had unwittingly given. "I am never bored. It was only—Oh!

don't be offended, I thought *you* at least would understand—only that I wanted my own home and my own people as well. Surely that is natural enough—in a woman!"

She was nearly crying again, and Max gave in at once; only too glad to catch at the suggested link between them.

"Very natural, and I quite understand. It was brutal of me to speak as if I didn't. Didn't I say to you only the other day that I wondered a woman like you could endure this life?—and now I wonder still more at the seraphic sweetness which even in your own trouble makes you think of the susceptibilities of those who find their gain in it. Well, when I think what this place would be without you, I can almost forgive Mrs. Logan for plotting to keep you here; though I wouldn't imitate her, or cost you one of those tears you have shed to-day, though it were for my whole life's happiness."

"I ought not to have let you see me shed them," said Lil. She was calmer now, and the increased warmth of Max's manner had recalled her to self-consciousness and the realisation of the confidential attitude they seemed to have assumed towards one another. She stood upright, and even tried to smile a little as she spoke. "It was very childish of me; but I am sure you will try to forget it, and not let the

Logans think that I am ungrateful to them for their kindness and hospitality."

"No one shall know or think anything but what you choose," said Max eagerly, "except myself; and you cannot help what I think of you. Only don't talk as if you were sorry for having given me this tiny confidence, for letting me see you even once as you really are; and in kindness to me don't ask me to forget it."

"I asked *that* in kindness to myself," said Lil, blushing very vividly. "Indeed I would rather you did, though I thank you very much for being so good-natured, and now I must go and hide myself till I have got these horrid eyes of mine right, or Mrs. Logan will be seeing them."

"I will go and look for her, and keep her away from you," said Max, thinking it better to make a virtue of necessity, though he would far rather have gone on devoting himself to the entertainment of the younger lady. There was no hope for that, however; Lil had only given him one swift, rather tremulous smile, and was gone.

Yet he had scored more than he suspected. There are no "hooks of steel" to bind people closer together than sympathy given and accepted; and when these two, whose relations had been so strained before, next met, their first mutual glance might have revealed even to an outsider that

there was a link between them closer and warmer than had ever previously existed.

Max came very near blessing Mr. Hardy after all. He did bless his own leg for being manifestly so far from healing as to make it impossible for him to accompany his host and their mutual friend Nicholson, when, a week later, they set out, as had been arranged, for Monte San Felipe, leaving him and Meggy as joint protectors of the ladies until the host's return; but perhaps the veil Max cast over his feelings at this arrangement was a more transparent one than he thought; or the least observing people, to all outward appearance, sometimes see most; for the night before his departure, Logan somewhat startled Mr. Lorimer by striding into his bed-room and taking a seat on the foot of the trestle-bed which formed its principal article of furniture, whence he proceeded to impart certain directions as to the final cure of the young man's leg, adding:

"I don't need to tell you, Mr. Lorimer, how vexed and sorry I am that you should have got this hurt in my house; but if you do as I say, I believe another fortnight will set you up, and see you quite able to do the twenty miles to Punta Quemada, where you meet the *diligencia* for town. Meggy would see that you had a good horse, and would ride so far with you; so I hope you won't be a prisoner against your

will much longer; though of course if you *like* to stay on till my return——"

Max hastened to say he thought that was quite arranged, and that, so far from being an imprisonment, he was only too glad to be able to repay a little of the immense kindness he had met with at Casa Blanca by giving whatever help he could, especially in the way of protection, to the women of the household, in the absence of their legitimate guardian. Jack Logan smiled under his beard, but grimly; the interruption only made it easier for him to say what was on his mind.

"Aye, aye, that's well and kindly said; and I don't doubt, being a gentleman, you mean what you say, and that you *would* protect them—No, not from outside dangers; there ain't much fear of them just now, seeing that the country's quiet enough, and that I'm rather a popular man with the *gente*[1] about here: but from annoyance or—or embarrassment of any sort. Of course, there's no denying that Miss Hardy is a very pretty girl——"

"Sir!" cried Max hotly, but Logan only waved a big hand, and went on without listening:

"And she is in my care, which is so much the same as being my daughter, that if any trouble came to her, I should

[1] Folks.

hold myself responsible for it, and—well, it don't need to say *what* I'd do, for I'm sure no one that ever broke bread under my roof would willingly give me occasion for it. Now your friend Nicholson thinks you're the least bit inclined to be smitten with her, and small blame to you too; for, as I said, she's a very pretty girl, and a very sweet one; but smitings in the general way lead to flirtations, as you young men know well enough, and that's just what I don't want, *entiende?*[1] They're amusing enough things, and harmless enough, I don't doubt, in the general way; but they *mightn't* be either to her; and for that reason I want you, as a gentleman and a man of honour, not to indulge in them. Nicholson tells me you come of swell folks, and are heir to a goodish property in the old country; so it ain't likely you'll settle down here even if you take up the life for a bit of pastime. Now, Lil Hardy is a lady, as any one can see, but I happen to know she hasn't a cent of her own, and ain't likely to have; and as to her father—well, he's a friend of mine, and I don't listen to gossip; but there are folks who hint that his life's not been an altogether straight one, and that that was what brought him out here in the first place; and since, from things you've dropped, I take it that you've been brought up with rather select and particular notions on

[1] Do you understand?

most subjects, marriage would very likely be among 'em, so——

"I assure you, Mr. Logan," said Max haughtily—he had tried very hard to get a word in several times before, but without success—"that there is not the slightest necessity for all these cautions on your part. Marriage with any one is the very last thing in my thoughts, for the reason that I am not at all a rich man, as Mr. Nicholson supposes, but so poor a one that I can't even afford to entertain the idea of such a luxury as a wife for years to come; and as to flirting, I should hope my respect for Miss Hardy——"

"Exactly, *exactly*," Logan interrupted placidly; "that's just what I'm saying. You'd have too much respect for her, and for yourself too, to lead an innocent young girl, with none of her own folk here to look after her, and left *to* your care as it might be, into any fooleries that might make her unhappy. Don't I know that, and ain't that just why I'm so grateful to you for being willing to stay on a bit and help Meggy with looking after things for me—the women cattle into the bargain? Why, that's what I came in to thank you for. *They're* glad enough to have you, I can tell you. Why, my little woman has just been saying she don't care if I stay away longer than usual this year, so long as you're here. What d'ye say to that, *hombre?*"—with which and a hearty laugh

Jack Logan got off the bed, gave Lorimer's hand a farewell grip, and marched off, leaving the young man with an uncomfortable sense of having been lectured, and put on his honour into the bargain.

He was very wroth about it when he came to think it over. What, *he!* he who was probably the only one there who knew how to treat ladies properly, and who had already tried to give the other men a lesson in that respect by his exemplary courtesies and decorum—*he* to be talked to in this way. What the devil did Logan mean! A pretty idea, indeed, to set up his house as a temple of propriety after what his wife had let out respecting that romp over the whiskey-bottle, and the fellow whom Lil herself had horsewhipped (he little knew, thanks to Mrs. Logan's way of telling the story, that the incidents referred to as taking place during the girl's "*last visit*" dated back over a period of nearly ten years from the present time), and he wished Logan would come back, that he might ask if this was the sort of respect generally paid to Miss Hardy, and that he, Max Lorimer, was expected to copy. He was so indignant indeed that, as he undressed, he nearly made up his mind to leave Casa Blanca when his host did; but with the morrow came cooler counsels; and the sight of Lil's pale cheeks and wistful eyes as she watched the preparations for departure, which were not to include

her, made him resolve that to stay and protect her, to share her exile and brighten it by so doing, was even a nobler task than the vindication of his own insulted dignity.

CHAPTER X.

LIL FINDS A BROTHER.

"A brother to relieve, how exquisite the bliss!"
Burns.

"A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!"
Richard III., Act V. Scene iv.

LITTLE enough did Lil guess to whose rough but honest hand she owed the pleasant weeks that followed, perhaps the pleasantest in her whole life, though ushered in with such a baptism of tears: or what it was that had so transformed Max, and put him on his best and most chivalrous behaviour. She had never had a brother, and her father's reserve and unsociability had never given her the least idea of the comfort and pleasure of masculine companionship in a home where it is so bestowed that women lean on it, and look up to it as a most necessary and delightful complement of their lives. Frank Melville had indeed given her a suggestion of such a home life in his descriptions of the one led with his parents and sister in Scotland; and the tender, domestic side of Lil's

nature had responded to it with an unuttered longing, that since such things were, she might have been one of those for whom they were possible; but usually, and in the actual existence led by the Hardy girls, men were mere outside adjuncts to the amusements of life, dropping in for that purpose when wanted, and going away as soon as they had fulfilled it; while the mere notion of a man constantly with them, "always about the house," as Louie expressed it, had something in it far more appalling than pleasant.

Now, however, Lil had it; not the suggestion only, but the reality, a brother of her own (for Max had urged on both ladies that they should consider him in that light once they were left in his care), and an ideal brother too: one who was always at her beck and call, who delighted in being with her looked at her with admiration, and listened to her with pleasure; who sometimes teased her indeed, and sometimes was autocratic (as in their hearts women love the men they lean on to be), but never rude, never sullen or forward or flirting; and who could not only read poetry as no other man did or could, but was full of fun and nonsense, and kept them gayer than they could have believed possible. After all, John Logan had been unwise in his caution, as unwise as those who do the "greasing of the horse's teeth" business generally are. Lil could have held her own well enough

against Max Lorimer in his capacity of a gay young man of fashion, not indisposed to flirt with a pretty, provoking girl, and still less so with one of whose rigour in the way of social proprieties he did not entertain a very high idea; but Max, sobered and elevated into a *brother*, was something quite different: some one to rely on and confide in, and do all you could for; certainly not to snub or treat with flippant severity; or even to be shy and suspicious of as she had been of that other Max before. The whole thing was as delightful as it was dangerous.

The two walked, talked, read, and worked together from morning till night. Max, like most young men, had dabbled in poetry; and Lil took some of his verses, which she thought quite as beautiful as anything ever written by Tennyson or Byron, and set them to little Spanish airs: singing them to him afterwards in her young, pure voice, which, however untrained, sounded to Max, when wedded to his words, sweeter than any woman's he had ever heard. She mended his clothes too, sitting demurely at the work as a wife or sister might have done, while he watched the swift motions of her fingers with strange delight, in that the linen they so deftly pressed was for his wear and service: and as his leg got better, they walked and rode together, through the dewy morn or under sunsets of rose and pearl, without (which was curious

enough) Max finding any impropriety now in such excursions. Why should he, when it was *he* who was with her, and it was part of his duty to take care of her? Any past practices of the sort were as different from this as night from day. Nor, with all this, was Mrs. Logan neglected. Indeed, the very fact that life at Casa Blanca to Max meant Lil Hardy, and to Lil Max Lorimer, compelled these young people to affect, with the unconscious humbug of youth, to think even more of their hostess, and pay her more attention than usual. Happily Mrs. Logan was as thick-skinned as she was vain, for which reason she swallowed this pretence more easily than might have been imagined, and the three got on to perfection. It was a little dull for Meggy perhaps, as Max made but a poor companion at the bottle; but, possibly, he drank rather less himself in consequence, and (between the intervals of imbibing) was more busy than usual in assisting Don Tiburcio, the *capataz*, with the overseership of the estancia.

Those who read their Bible, however, will remember that even Paradise had its little troubles over the question of edible fruits, &c.; so that now and then there came a jar to the tranquillity of this earthly Eden, as might be expected. Lil was very fond of talking about her own home, and descanting on the perfections of Liz and Loo: even, as she grew more intimate with her "brother", of indulging him with fragments

from these young ladies' letters, which she kept lovingly by her, and read over and over again in default of other literature; but instead of finding that Max's admiration for the writers was increased by these confidences, Lil was cruelly hurt by the discovery that his ideas respecting them gained not at all in enthusiasm, and that he regarded the absent Miss Hardys as rather deserving of apology than admiration. Not that he was impolite enough to *say* so; but such phrases as, "Your sisters are awfully different from you, aren't they?" or, "By Jove! that's rather strong for a young lady! Miss Louie evidently goes in for the fast *rôle*," were sufficiently suggestive, and not only chilled Lil's confidences, but made her rather angry.

"What do you mean?" she would say indignantly. "Oh! *that*—well, of course it's a slang word, but I suppose Loo picked it up from some of the officers, and used it for fun. She's not fast at all. She is only a child, and such an amusing, saucy child too."

"Not much childishness in her, though, is there?" said Max; "but I beg your pardon, I don't doubt she's—awfully amusing, immensely so;" and then Lil was offended, and folding up the letter said severely:

"I see you don't understand my sisters in the least. Let us speak of something else."

It was ungrateful of Max, for she was much more sympathetic when he talked to her, not indeed about his sister; for, beyond that one casual reference to her, Max was not at all the sort of man to discuss the ladies of his own family with a girl who, however charming she might be in her own way, belonged to an utterly different world from theirs, and was never likely to come into contact with them; but of his college friends, his school pranks, of the great people he had seen, and the wild things he had done, of moonlight suppers at Richmond, and flirtations on the Isis, adapted and expurgated indeed for girlish ears; but which nevertheless left Lil with a very strong idea that her devoted squire of to-day had lived by no means as sober and sedate a youth as he should have done; and that *some* people might not have thought his step-father very unjust in the severity he had showed him. Lil herself could not feel very severe against the sinner, because he told of these wild days so frankly, and with so much mock innocence and humour; but she did say now and then:

"Oh, but that was dreadfully wrong. I didn't think you would do such things," to which Max made haste to reply:

"Of course it was wrong; but what is a young fellow to do, left suddenly alone in the world? I wouldn't go in for

that kind of thing now—now that I can be with *you*. See how steady and domestic I am at present; and it is all your doing." Which was such a flattering creed, that Lil tried her best to believe it, and make him better still by the prettiest little sermons, to which he listened with admirable docility. They seemed to have changed *rôles* at present. At any rate he had given up the idea of improving *her:* perhaps had forgotten there was need for it.

Once, however, he gave her a great fright. A post had come in, bringing among other letters one to Max from his sister, the first he had received from her since his landing in America; and Lil, who was sitting near him as he read it, noticed that he screwed up his lips and uttered a half ejaculation of surprise at some passage. A minute afterwards he turned to her, and said rather abruptly:

"You seem, from all you say, to be pretty intimate with the officers of the English men-of-war at Monte San Felipe. Did you ever happen to meet one of the name of *Melville?*"

For a moment Lil felt as if she should faint. The utterance of the name at this distant time, and by a man who of all others would seem to have least connection with it, seemed to take her breath away; and it was not for some seconds that she was even able to repeat it after him in a voice so

altered from her own, that if he had been a trifle more observant he must have noticed it.

"Yes, Frank Melville; he was flag-lieutenant on board the *Thunderer*," he said explanatorily; then fancying from her silence that she was trying to remember the person in question: "But I dare say you wouldn't recollect him. He wasn't at all *your* sort. I only met him myself once or twice when I was in Scotland some summers ago, and didn't take to him at all. He was rather a methodistical sort of fellow, and belonged to an awfully pious family that my step-sister was very thick with; but it seems he got killed out here in a riot at Carnival time. Do you remember it?"

"Yes . . I remember," said Lil. She could not have uttered another word to save her life, and she held her face bent over her work to hide the ghastly pallor which had crept into it; but Max was reading his letter, and did not see. "H'm —h'm, poor girl! Might have told me earlier though," she heard him mutter, though the agitated beating of her own heart took away the sense of the words. "Well, if I go there, I'll see to it:" then aloud:

"But you never happened to meet him, I suppose? I scarcely thought you would; for it seems he only joined the flag-ship a few weeks before he got knocked on the head.

By the way, do you often have those sorts of events at Carnival times?"

"Yes—no—not very often," Lil stammered. She added with an intense effort, "I did . . meet Mr. . . . ." but the name died away, and Max, thinking she was at a loss for it, suggested:

"Melville?"

"Yes, he came . . . to a party at our house. A friend brought him. It was only a few days before . . ."

"Ah, I see, so you hadn't much time to get acquainted with him. Poor fellow, I must own I thought him rather a molly-coddle, the last sort of man to get killed in a street row; but I'm sorry for him, awfully—— Where are you going, Miss Hardy?"

"To—to Mrs. Logan. I think perhaps she wants me," said Lil, and made her escape. If she had died for it she could not have sat there a moment longer. To speak of that terrible event, one connected so horribly with herself, and to a person who could treat it so flippantly, was impossible. She found it difficult to be the same to Max for a day or two afterwards, and carefully avoided being left alone with him; although, to her half-indignant relief, the subject seemed to have made so little impression on him that he never alluded to it again, and only made himself so unhappy over the

change in her manner that she had to make an effort to get over it, and was perhaps kinder than before in consequence.

Neither thought how soon, or how suddenly, this happy, idyllic life was to come to a close; or that while they talked and walked and rode in an atmosphere, the mere breathing of which made life delicious and exhilarating, that gay city which formed the theme of so much of Lil's talk was already cowering panic-stricken under the pale hand of the spectre, cholera; or that the weeks which were flying by so joyously for them were to be solemnised for many a summer afterwards in every church in Uruguay by masses said for the souls of "*los difuntos en el año del cólera*, 18—." Mrs. Logan had received two letters from her husband, one from Monte San Felipe, and one from Coluna, a large town higher up the river, where he had been called on business, which, he wrote, might delay his return for some weeks longer: and the first letter had much in it about the unlooked-for arrival of the dreaded pest, imported, as it was said, by an Italian vessel from Rio Janeiro, and of the rapid and terrifying spread it was already making; but as he had gone out of the way of infection himself, Mrs. Logan was not personally alarmed about it, and when she read the accounts to Max, did so in private, adding at the conclusion:

"Don't say anything to Lil about it. Jack doesn't wish

it, lest she should get nervous about her sisters. She's inclined already to feel worried and unsettled at not having heard from either of them by the last two posts; and though I tell her 'no news is good news', and that likely as not they're quite well, and only too lazy to write, she's just the sort of girl who, if she even got a hint of this cholera business at home, would want to rush off there on the instant, or make herself ill with fretting about it; and what would be the good of either?"

"None at all. I think we ought to be thankful that she's here in safety," said Max devoutly. "I'm sure I am; though my leg is well, and I know I ought to go."

"You don't be absurd! As if we'd *let* you go till Logan comes back: and not then if we can help it. Be off, and tell Meggy to be careful none of the Spanish papers get in Lil's way, that's all."

And Max obeyed, and then went in search of Lil, and made himself so pleasant and amusing to her that she soon forgot the little disappointment of having had no letters, and shone out in all her wonted smiles again.

The next three weeks passed quietly enough away, and *then*—— Max was coming into the house one day, booted and spurred, from a ride round the *puestos*, which he had been taking with Don Tiburcio, when he was met by Lil in the

saguan. She held a letter in her hand, and her face was not only pale but livid, the lips dry, and the sweet blue eyes seeming to burn out of the hollows which had formed round them.

"I am glad you have come," she said, going up to him, and he was shocked to hear that her voice was as altered as her face. "I—I want you to tell Mrs. Logan that she must let me have a horse. I will not harm it; it is only to take me to Punta Quemada, and then the *gaucho* who goes with me can bring it back. I can get the *diligencia* there——"

"The diligence? What for? Lil—Miss Hardy, what is the matter? For God's sake don't look so! Tell me what you mean," cried Max in bewilderment, and clasping the girl's hands in his as he flung his hat and whip on one side. He was glad to feel that she did not shrink away; that the dry, burning fingers seemed to cling to him as for support.

"Have you had—bad news?" he asked, very tenderly, and with something of a guilty feeling in guessing what the news might be; but Lil's eyes met his with a piteous, appealing gaze which knew no suspicion.

"It is from Louie," she said in a faint, husky whisper. "I *knew* they would have written if—I don't know where

the other letter is, and this is more than ten days old. It was brought by a chance messenger. *Ten days!* Oh God! what mayn't have happened since then!"

Her head dropped on to her hands with a low wailing cry of such hopeless anguish as Max could not bear to hear. On the instinct of the moment, he put his arm round her, and drew her gently down on to the bench near which she was standing, begging her with tears in his own eyes not to give way so—to tell him what was the matter. Was her sister—ill?

"Lisbeth—Read it," said Lil hoarsely. "Oh, if I had only known sooner!" and as he took the letter her head was bowed lower and lower, and her whole frame quivered with a sorrow too keen for tears; and which Max, kneeling beside her, seemed to feel in each responsive nerve. He was still holding one of her hands, and she let him do it unheedingly, while he read Louie's badly-written epistle. It was alarming enough.

"DEAREST LIL,

"Your letter has just come, and I don't know what you mean by rowing us for not writing. Liz and I both wrote, quite a fortnight ago, a great thick letter; but *quien sabe*[1] if the post-office people in the interior don't burn the letter-bags from here now, for fear of spreading the infection?

[1] Who knows?

It would be just like them; for every one who isn't dead to-day is so awfully afraid of being so to-morrow that they do the wildest things in their terror. The heat is awful. Government won't let a bit of fruit or vegetable be sold in the town; every one is running away, and we are as *triste* as possible. Even the men-of-war have been ordered off, and the estancieros, who generally make us a little lively at this time, ran away again to the camp almost as soon as they arrived. I call it disgustingly cowardly. *We* have to stay here, so why shouldn't they? And I'm not a bit sorry for Robert Campion, who positively took the cholera from nothing but funk at the sight of the black crosses which Government has had painted up on the doors of the infected houses. He was seized on the staircase of the Hotel Orientàl, carried up into a bed-room, and lies there now; but I don't think it can be a bad attack, for that was the evening before last, and he was still alive this morning, while most of the cases now only last two hours from the first seizure to the last gasp. Mr. Logan we only saw twice, as he *pretended* to have important business at Coluna, and went off there as soon as he could. He said you were as blooming and jolly as possible; and Liz and I envy you, for I'm sure *we* couldn't be more miserable. Little Enriquez, over the way, and his mother, are both dead, and the house next them has the black cross on the door; while all day long the cathedral bells keep toll, tolling, and from morning to night a black stream of hearses are going out to the Campo Santo. Nearly all our English friends, and most people who can afford it, have run away to their *quintas* in the suburbs, or wherever a house can be got;

and there's a dreadful story of one poor lady taken ill in the carriage, with her nurse and children, on the way out, and dying before they could get to their journey's end. Juana told it me; but *quien sabe* if it's true, for she 'sups full o' horrors', as Shakespeare or some one else says. Anyhow, the death-list for last night was sixty-eight; and if papa don't come back soon I shouldn't wonder if you were the only one of his daughters left alive. Poor Liz seems awfully seedy now! I don't *think* it's the cholera, for it began with a splitting headache and feverishness last night; but to-day she's much worse, and can't get up, and I feel frightened; so please excuse this dismal letter, and write soon, or maybe we shall both be dead before your letter comes. Love from poor Liz, and with same from self, ever, Lil dearest,

"Yours lovingly,

"Loo."

Max folded the letter, and looked up hastily into the beautiful eyes, which were gazing at him with such an evident appeal for comfort, that even at the expense of truth he must needs have given it; though all he could say at first was:

"Dear Miss Hardy, it may have been only a feverish attack. Don't be so unhappy. You see even her sister says it was not cholera."

"She said she—did not think it was," said Lil brokenly; "and that was ten days ago; and it will be nearly three more before I can get there, even if I start before daybreak to-morrow."

"What is that you're saying, Lil?" cried Mrs. Logan, as she came out of the *comedor*, bringing Max on to his feet with some alacrity at the sight of her, though Lil never moved. "You're not *still* talking of going, are you? As if you *could*, and alone too! Such nonsense! Mr. Lorimer, Max, do speak to her and tell her not to be so foolish. Fancy wanting to rush off into the midst of the pestilence when she's safe here, and couldn't do any good, and even Loo Hardy doesn't say one word about wanting her. Come, Lil, dear, I'm very sorry for you; but don't be silly, for we can't listen to you, and ten to one they're all right now."

But Lil's fingers had found Max's again, and were clenched on them. He could hear her sobbing whisper:

"Tell her I only want a horse. If she won't lend me one, I will walk to Gregorio's *puesto*[1] and borrow one of his. He would lend it me, I know. Oh God! if I could only ride the whole way and get there sooner! Lisbeth! Lisbeth!"

Her voice died away in choking sobs, which all Mrs. Logan's coaxing and arguments were powerless to check. Even to Max's persuasions, though wiser and gentler in their wording, she would not listen; while his offer, eagerly made and repeated, to go up to Monte San Felipe himself, seek out her sisters, and send or bring her news of them, only had the

[1] Shepherd's house.

effect of making her burst into the first tears she had yet shed. Mrs. Logan exclaimed aloud at the Quixotry of the idea.

"The notion of *you* running your head into such a pest-place, and for nothing that a letter wouldn't serve for as well! I should think finely of Lil if she let you think of doing such a thing."

Lil looked up at her too sorrowfully for anger.

"You know, and so does he, that I would not," she said, her lips trembling; then as Max began an energetic protestation: "Oh yes, you meant it—*I* know that; but do you think, when they are my own sisters, alone there—perhaps ill, perhaps dying, and I well and hearty, that I would let any one else go to them in my place? Hush, hush! don't say any more about it," for Mrs. Logan had commenced to argue afresh. "I thought *you* would have helped me, knowing how you would have felt if it had been your husband who had written to you in this way from all that distance off; all those miles and miles—" her voice choked—"I can't talk," she said abruptly, and rising to her feet with her tears dried again, and a white set look, not like Lil's, in her face; "but I am going to them all the same. I shall find a way."

Max came to her side, speaking quickly and authoritatively. "If you must go, you must, and I will find the way, and

make it as easy for you as I can. Mrs. Logan will let Tiburcio have horses for us, of course. She was only trying to keep you, out of kindness; but no one will hinder you if you will only be calm and bear up. Do—do try to do that now."

Lil looked at him in a half-bewildered manner. A moment before she had been lashed up to a sort of nervous desperation by the very helplessness of despair; but this sudden promise of help, this strong, soothing tone, sounded to her like an angel's voice, taking away the need of strength in herself by substituting that of another. The *words* he said hardly reached her ears; but the sense of them—that she was to have her will, and he would manage it for her—filled her with a boundless gratitude which she never forgot; and when, seeing how pale and faint she looked, he drew her hand through his arm, and leading her into the sala, bade her, in the same tone as before, lie down and rest while he went to make arrangements for her journey, she obeyed him as meekly as a child, letting him darken the room, and shake up the cushions under her head before he left her; and then (more like a child still) crying herself to sleep over the letter which had shaken the peaceful order of her life into such sudden ruin.

It was well for her perhaps that she did not hear the in-

dignant exclamation uttered by Mrs. Logan as Max rejoined her.

"Upon my word, Mr. Lorimer, then I'm to understand you're going to leave me here by myself, and march off with Miss Hardy? A nice return to me, I think, after all my hospitality to you both; and I hope you're prepared to answer to Logan for it! I can tell you he wouldn't approve of such wild doings; and if she will be mad enough to go in the teeth of what I say, there's Tiburcio, who's been with us for over six years, and knows all about such things, is a much properer person to take charge of her and put her in the *diligencia* at Punta Quemada than you. He's done it for me once when I was going to join Logan; and an escort that's good enough for the lady of the house is good enough for the guest, *I'm* sure."

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

HOMEWARD ONCE MORE.

"Alone in the dim-lit stage-coach,
We travelled far and wide;
And never a word we uttered,
Though we sat side by side.
But when the morning dawned, love,
How astonished then we were!
For Love sat warm between us,
The blind little passenger!"—*Heine.*

"The silence of death! I sat down quite composedly . . . and looked up the street towards our old house. It was the same street, the same house, but silent, dead, petrified!"—*Letters of Jane Carlyle.*

It was by the waning light of a yellow moon sinking slowly towards the undulating outlines of the western horizon that Lil Hardy looked her last at the estancia. How the hours between then and the arrival of that letter had passed, she never knew; nor how warm an argument had been waged between Max and Mrs. Logan over her unconscious head, while she, poor passionate-natured child, lay weeping bitterly in the refuge he had found for her.

"I am ready to answer to your husband for any or all of my conduct respecting Miss Hardy," Max said, with a sternness which, from the handsome boy she so much admired, had a somewhat quelling effect on his hostess; "and I'm quite sure of one thing, that if he were here, he would *not* consider a rough Spaniard, his *gaucho* servant, to be the fittest protector for a young English girl in Miss Hardy's position, while there are friends and countrymen of her own able and willing to perform so small an act of courtesy for her."

"Right you are, Mr. Lorimer!" cried Meggy, who had joined the discussion. "And what's more, if you didn't take Miss Lil, I would—*Carrambo!* yes, and not to Punta Quemada only, but every inch of the way; for if we didn't, I'm damned if she wouldn't go by herself; and what would Jack Logan say then? As it is, I don't offer because I don't doubt she'd prefer you; and seeing that the Señora's got me as well as Tiburcio to look after *her*, I don't think there's *gran' cosa* for her to complain of,"—on which Mrs. Logan declared she was not thinking of herself, burst into tears, called them unjust and brutal, and finally retired in incipient hysterics which it required more than one strong glass of brandy-and-water to subdue.

"Half-and-half only, my dear boy," said Meggy as he stirred the mixture carefully before taking it to her. "Bless

you, she's got the head of a trooper, that little woman, and it'll only sweeten her—sweeten her like a nut, you'll see."

Of all this Lil knew nothing, however. The short, disturbed slumber which followed her crying fit, was broken by Max bringing her her dinner on a tray, and bidding her with gentle peremptoriness to sit up and eat it, and then go straight to bed, and get what sleep she could, as he found she would have to start before daylight next morning; the *diligencia* which they hoped to catch being due to leave Punta Quemada about nine o'clock. Meggy, he said, was making all arrangements about horses; and Lil thanked him with a fervency of gratitude which almost upset the brotherly severity which Max was making a vigorous effort to assume. It was a relief to him that she accepted so readily his somewhat bungling explanation that Mrs. Logan had gone to bed with a bad headache; but in truth Lil's mind was too much absorbed by the one crushing anxiety which held it to admit of room for minor questions, and the time seemed to pass like one long bewildered dream to her, till the welcome moment when she heard Max's voice at her bed-room door, saying:

"Three o'clock, Miss Hardy. You had better get up, for we must be gone in half-an-hour."

Mrs. Logan was awake too, and had relented so far as to

see the girl had some breakfast, and bid her a tolerably cordial farewell ; adding :

"It's for your own sake entirely that I set my face against this, Lil, and if you will do it, and harm comes of it, don't blame me—that's all. Perhaps, if you're spared to do so, you'll own some day Carry Logan was your truest friend for trying to keep you here ;" and Lil thanked and kissed her and went away, barely able at the last to see the sympathy beaming in every line of Meggy's sodden features, as she let him take her slender hand in both his dirty, shaking ones ; and bid her "God speed, and *buen viage !*"

Max was already in the saddle, his face looking very grave and determined in the grey, weird light ; and behind them came a *gaucho*, carrying across his saddle the *muletas*[1] which contained such clothes and necessaries as Lil had hastily put up for the journey ; and in this guise, at half-past three on a summer morning, the little party set out : Don Tiburcio Meggy, and half a dozen of the *employés* forming a group outside the estancia, and waving their hats as long as they were in sight.

It was not an unpleasant ride at first under that yellow moon, and while the air was still fresh and dewy, and the little prairie owls, sitting each on his hummock, and staring

[1] Saddle-bags.

gravely at the passers-by, looked like an army of feathered elves whom the first gleam of daylight would cause to melt into nothingness; but as night faded into dawn, and the great red sun rose slowly above the eastern edge of the plain, filling the whole world in one instant with the intolerable, golden glare of day, there sprang up from the north a hot, unpleasant wind, blowing clouds of white dust before it across the arid plains, and enveloping the travellers in dense volumes of the same gritty, blinding substance. Even the thick gauze veil which Lil had tied over her face formed no protection against the infliction; but she never murmured, or indeed hardly spoke at all the whole way. The one question in her mind, "Was she even then sisterless?" deadened it against all outer distractions; and as they rode along, keeping their horses at the apparently gentle, but really swift, trot which is the general pace in the camp, Max noticed that her eyes were ever gazing out straight ahead of her, as if across those limitless miles of prairie she could see the home to which they were journeying.

Punta Quemada was reached at half-past eight, and Lil roused herself from the sort of stupor which had carried her on through dust, fatigue, and heat, to this stage, with the first sensation of pleasure she had yet experienced. Fortunately for her, the diligence which they had ridden so far and

fast to catch, had not yet left the town, and they were in time to secure a place for her in it; but though Lil's face brightened into a glad smile at this discovery, she was almost sinking in her saddle with weariness from the long ride she had already undergone; and Max had to lift her to the ground, and place her on a bench outside the *pulperia*[1] where the coach stopped, as if she had been a child. Even then he stood looking at her with an expression on his face which brought a faint tinge of colour into the whiteness of hers, and made her say, as if in answer to it:

"I am not so *very* tired. Indeed I am not. It is worse for you in some ways."

'For me!" said Max, sharply. "What nonsense you talk! As if a twenty mile ride were anything to a *man;* while you—it has half killed you already. If only I could carry you the rest of the way!"

But he turned away abruptly as he spoke, and Lil saw him asking in his broken Spanish of the *péon* who had come with them, if there was no hotel, no decent inn even, in the place, where the lady could get rested and refreshed before proceeding on her journey. The man shook his head. There was the *pulperia* before them, the best, and indeed the only one worth naming, in Punta Quemada, which was

[1] Wineshop.

after all nothing but a scattered group of about twenty or thirty dingy, tumble-down habitations, with one unpaved street full of deep holes and ruts, running through them, and an open, weed-grown space or plaza overlooked by a big church half in ruins; where the *diligencia*, a most ancient, dilapidated vehicle, its tiny windows coated with dust and dirt, its interior half-filled with filthy straw, and its clumsy, ponderous wheels caked with mud, stood waiting for the horses to be brought out of the yard of the *pulperia* in front of which it was drawn up. Lil came up to Max as he stood, the centre of a group of swarthy, gaping, chattering natives, contemplating it with a face of absolute despair, and touched him on the arm.

"Don't look so," she said gently; "it will all do well enough for me. See, I am twenty miles nearer home; that is all I think of; and now do try and get something to eat in that place, bad as it is, for I'm sure you must be famished. Remember, you've a long ride back to the estancia before you; though I suppose you won't start till the cool of the day, when you and the horses have had a good rest. I shall have tired you sadly anyhow."

She spoke quite bravely, almost brightly; for indeed it had only just occurred to her how few minutes must now elapse before their parting; and in the sudden sinking of

heart occasioned by the thought, and the dread of its being apparent on her face, she almost overdid her cheerfulness; but Max only looked at her rather strangely, and saying, "Don't be in such a hurry to get rid of me. It is your journey we have to think of now, not mine," he drew her hand through his arm and led her into the *pulperia*, which host, hostess, and half the idlers in the place had been entreating them to enter before. Here they found a large room enveloped in a steam of garlic and tobacco-smoke, through which were dimly apparent a number of people eating, smoking, and drinking, with among them the burly, bloated form of the driver of the *diligencia*, a yellow-skinned *mestizo*[1] of the lowest type, who was adjuring his passengers to make haste with their breakfasts, as they must be on the road again in twenty minutes.

With a good deal of difficulty, and much palavering and chaffering, Max got Lil admitted by preference into a tiny inner room, the bed-chamber of the *pulpero's* wife; but so quiet and clean by comparison that the girl, who had involuntarily shrunk back and clung closer to her companion's arm at the sight of the scene without, felt as if she had gained a harbour of refuge. The woman, too, was civil and kindly, though evidently wondering much at what could have brought

[1] Half-breed.

the beautiful young *Inglesa* there, travelling on horseback, and by the common *diligencia*, instead of in a carriage hired for the whole journey, as well-to-do people generally did; and barely had she gone to her other guests than Max knocked at the door, bringing his fair charge a big tumbler of red wine and a not over-clean plate heaped with a large piece of steak reeking of garlic, and half a roll of bread.

"I could get you nothing else, and they wanted you to eat it out there," he said shortly; "but that is impossible. Try to eat it, please. You have only ten minutes, and you will want all your strength."

He went away almost as he spoke, without smiling as usual, or even waiting to be thanked, and Lil's eyes filled as she asked herself (forgetting her other trouble for the moment) what was the matter with him, and whether he was finding the trouble he had undertaken so disagreeable as to make even the maintenance of his former kindness a difficult task.

After all, she knew that he had no inborn love of rough people, or "roughing it" generally, as that process is performed in South America; and she had no claim on him—none in the world. He had been very charming, very kind and nice, during the latter weeks of their stay at the estancia, and had so insensibly wound himself into her affections in

his character of "brother", that in her hour of trouble she had turned to him, as if it were a matter of course, for the help she needed, and he had given it; but now that her mind was clearer, she could look back and see that it was not given voluntarily. He, too, had disapproved of this journey of hers; and had only agreed to assist her in it when she declared that if no one did so she must prosecute it unaided. Ought she to have accepted such assistance—to have forced herself upon him, as it were—and was he perchance thinking her bold and unmaidenly in consequence; rejoicing perhaps that another few minutes would set him free of her and her concerns?

The mere thought covered the girl's face with blushes, and made her for the moment so dread the idea of seeing him again that she almost wished he had already started on his return journey, and left her to pursue hers alone; though the prospect of the latter, and of the company with whom she might be thrown, made her shrink, and pale, and wish with all her heart that Mrs. Logan had allowed her to have the escort of the civil *péon*, who had accompanied her so far, for the whole way; but by the time she got to this wish there was a knock at the door, and as Max put in his head she hoped he did not see the crimson colour which rushed into her cheeks at the sight of him.

"Is it—time?" she asked, rising hastily, but speaking almost in a whisper in her extreme nervousness.

Lorimer looked at her with evident anxiety.

"I wish it were not. You look more fit to be in bed than travelling in that wretched old waggon; but the horses have been put to, and I have secured you a corner seat, where you can put your feet up, at any rate, when you are very tired. You are in luck's way in having only two other inside passengers; but," looking at her plate, "what a little you have eaten! Surely that was foolish."

Lil tried to smile, her lips trembling sadly.

"I eat all I could. Don't be troubled about me, Mr. Lorimer. It is very, very good of you; but indeed you need not be anxious. I shall do very well."

"So you think," said Max. "Perhaps you don't know, however, that your next resting-place won't be reached till sundown; and though I've laid in a bottle of wine and some biscuits to keep you up *en route*, you must take care one of your fellow-passengers doesn't get sight of them, for he has had more than is good for him in the liquor way already, and might get obstreperous if he had more."

Lil turned very white. It seemed to her that Lorimer spoke with unnecessary, almost cruel, bluntness, considering the natural timidity which any young girl might feel at the

prospect before her; but though she could not resist turning her startled eyes on him in a kind of terrified appeal, she dropped them the next moment, and clenched her teeth upon her lip to keep herself from one word which might seem like a further claim on his good offices. She even took her hand off his arm, lest he should feel how it was trembling, and stepped by herself into the clumsy, ill-hung vehicle, on to the box of which the driver was just clambering, the while he shouted to his other passengers to cut short their parting potations, or they would be left behind. The *gaucho* from Casa Blanca came up at the same moment with Lil's *muletas*, and took a hearty farewell of her; so cordial indeed in its mingling of unaffected respect and regret for the beautiful Señorita's departure, that Lil had hard work to keep the tears from her eyes, and to steady her voice, as she said, turning to Max, who was silently stowing away her bag at her feet, so as to form a footstool for her:

"And now I must bid *you* good-bye, too. How good you have been to me, Mr. Lorimer, and I can't thank you enough! —I can't even try—" Her voice was quivering in spite of herself, and she broke off. "You must tell Mrs. Logan—"

"What?" asked Max, looking up at her from his half-kneeling position. "If you have any messages for Mrs. Logan, you must give them to Gonzalez, for I am not

likely to see her again before you do. Did you think I should?"

Lil's eyes opened wide, and the colour rushed in a hot tide into the cheeks a moment back so deadly pale, that she had been glad of the semi-darkness of the coach to hide them.

"You—you are not coming *with* me!" she exclaimed; then: "But, Mr. Lorimer, you must not. Indeed, indeed I never thought of such a thing. I will not let you do it. I —I ought not to have let you do all you have done, only—"

"Only you could not prevent me," said Max. The other passengers were just stumbling and clambering into the coach, and he spoke very low, his face lifted to hers, and his eyes shining with a fervid, passionate brightness. "And you will not now. Lil, do you *wish* to do so, to send me away from you? You cannot, even if you do, for I tell you frankly that no power on earth could make me leave you, or let you out of my care, till you are safe in your own home; but I can go on the box: I won't force myself on you if—if I am disagreeable to you: if you don't want me?"

Lil looked at him piteously. Her colour was coming and going, and the tears were running down her cheeks, while her two hands trembled like aspen-leaves in the strong grasp of his.

"But Mrs. Logan will be expecting you. It isn't *right* you should," she said brokenly, yet with that habit of submission so perilously natural to her: "I never once thought——"

"You never once thought what you were to me," Max interrupted. "No, you never did, or you could not have said good-bye so easily. My darling, do you know it now?"

* * * * * *

It was late on the evening of the second day after leaving Logan's estancia, when stiff, jaded, and almost unrecognisable from dirt, dust, and the pallor induced by heat and weariness, the two travellers emerged from their long confinement in the stifling, jolting vehicle by which they had journeyed, and stood at last on the pavement of Monte San Felipe. Any one who has ever been brutal enough to go down to the pier at Folkestone, to inspect the unhappy passengers landing from the Boulogne packet, will know how ghastly is the transmogrification which even a Venus or an Adonis undergo on such occasions; but not even the miseries of twelve hours in a Channel steamer could equal those of the victims of the Uruguayan *diligencia*, now happily passing away before the reign of iron rails and steam; and if ever Adonis posed as Vulcan, and Venus for the ghost of an enfeebled and peni-

tential Mænad, Max Lorimer and Lil might have done so on the occasion in question.

There had not been much, if any, love-making after those words of Max last recorded. Indeed, they were spoken so low, and there was so much noise and confusion going on all around, that Lil might almost have doubted whether she had heard them at all, but for the grip of her fingers which accompanied them, and the quick shock and thrill which ran through every vein of her body in answer. Other reply she made him none; but their eyes met for one long instant, his full of passionate, imperious appeal, hers wide and liquid in that look of wondering, exquisite, half-terrified recognition of something existent, though unknown before—a woman's look, yet a virgin's, and with the unconscious innocence of virginity, asking everything and confessing everything in one and the same instant. That was all her answer, and Max needed no more. In that full dual glance the whole story was told, and as she turned her eyes away, and sat crimsoned and trembling, with strange, swift pulses quivering through every drop of blood in her slender frame, it seemed to her as if a hurricane of bells was ringing in her ears, and voices—loud, indecent voices—singing and shouting, "He loves you, and you love him. You have told him so. You have loved him all along: when he was hurt and in pain, when you were

quarrelling and when you were friends, when you forgot your home-sickness in his kindness, and when you lay crying on your bed, and did not know that it was half for the sisters you were going to, and half for the parting from him, who had grown to be more than sister or brother—you loved him, loved him all the time, with the love that only woman gives to man, and never gives but once in all her life; and you know it now, and he too. The tree of knowledge has blossomed for you as for every Eve in this earthly Eden, and you have given of the fruit to him: *he knows you love him!*"

Max himself was wonderfully quiet and self-restrained. Perhaps he saw the intensity of the girl's agitation, and felt vexed with himself for having provoked it at such a time, and in so cruelly public a place, where there was neither protection nor escape for her; for the coach had already started, and amid shouts, and yells, and whip-crackings, neighing of horses and barking of dogs, had begun to lumber along its creaking, jolting way. Not that he thought she *wished* to escape. He was man enough to know full well that there was no anger in that startled, shamefaced, lovely look; and the knowledge brought him an irrepressible throb of joy and triumph; but he had not meant to betray or commit himself by any impetuosity; rather, on the contrary, to show that he had overcome the folly and passion of early youth, and could

keep his word, and play the part of brother and guardian to an unprotected girl, without plunging into love-making before he himself knew if he had any definite end in it.

So, though they travelled together, sitting side by side, scarcely a word was spoken between them for some time, nor any bearing on the revelation just made. The tipsy passenger slept and snored, and fell forward at every jolt of the vehicle, and had to be poked up and pushed into his place again; and the sober one, after a few attempts at conversation with Max, tried to sleep too, or find amusement in reading a greasy, crumpled Monte San Felipian newspaper, many days old, and exclaiming aloud at the cholera reports therein. The day waxed hotter and hotter, and the atmosphere more stifling; while when Max (distressed by the pale exhaustion of his companion's face) managed to force open one of the miserable little windows of the crazy vehicle, such a cloud of dust rushed in as nearly suffocated them. There was nothing to be done but shut it again, and try to give her what relief he could by fanning her with his broad-rimmed straw hat; and Lil thanked him, and begged him not to trouble, trying to smile, yet with a certain timidity and avoidance of his gaze, so new, and yet so pretty and girlish, that he could not resist putting out his unoccupied hand to the slender bare one nearest him, and holding it close clasped in his.

So they journeyed on through the sun-scorched monotonous country; now passing flocks of sheep or horses, driven by swarthy, wild-looking *tropèros;* now disturbing a herd of ostriches, which scurried away at their approach like wind-tossed plumes of feathers, and were lost to sight at once in clouds of yellow dust; now stuck fast in the stiff mud of a river-bed, when Max and the other male passengers had to get out and do their best by hauling and struggling to get the heavy vehicle, and plunging, frightened horses, to land again; and anon stopping to dine and change steeds at a roadside *pulperia,* where Lil's beauty and Lorimer's nationality attracted somewhat embarrassing attention; thence travelling on again till night; when, worn out, and almost faint with heat, smother, and weariness, they clattered over the stony streets of the little town of Santa Elena, where they put up for the night.

And next day it was the same thing over again—heat, dust, sun, smother, jolting, creaking, labouring on, with the addition that they began to pass more houses, horsemen, and waggons on the way, and that they carried with them two or three extra passengers from Santa Elena, who informed Max and his companions that that little town was filled with refugees from the cholera in Monte San Felipe; and that, though some people declared that the epidemic was beginning to take its departure from the latter place, others said that it was far

worse even than reported, and that the death-lists in the daily bulletins were placed at a lower number than should have been the case, by order of the Government.

Max could only understand fragments of this conversation, but Lil listened eagerly ; and though she said nothing, it went to his heart to see the silent tears stealing down her cheek, and the look of ever-increasing anxiety overpowering even fatigue and exhaustion as the slow hours of the day dragged wearily on.

What could he do but what he had done before? Hold that poor little trembling hand in his, and whisper comforting words now and then ; or once, when late in the day, and utterly worn out, she dropped into a broken sleep, draw the tired head down to rest on his shoulder, and gently fan the pale fair face across which no shadow of feminine peevishness or complaint had come the whole time.

It was like waking from a never-ending, troublesome dream, when at last, after a final hour of worse jolting, clattering, and shaking than all the rest, the coach pulled up with a jerk at the diligence agency, in a narrow, dingy street in Monte San Felipe ; and Lil was so stiff and faint from the long confinement, that as Max helped her to alight, she staggered, and would have fallen on her face but for his supporting arm. The mere feel of the city pavement to her feet, however, the

familiar shops and houses all around, the long rows of gas-lamps, more than all, the fresh, homelike scent of the sea-breeze in her face, revived her instantly, and in her eagerness to get home she would scarcely wait till a carriage could be got for her from the livery-stables near; but entreated Max to let her walk up to the house then and there. He, on the other hand, was urgent that she should remain where she was till a messenger could be sent to her home to ascertain the state of things there; dreading, as he did above all things, lest the mere entrance into an infected house in her excited and overwrought condition might be sufficient to give her the terrible disease, the ravages of which were apparent even here in the shuttered houses and desolate-looking streets on either side of them. They were still arguing the point, when a young man, unmistakably English in appearance, passed them, and after a prolonged and not very well-bred stare at Lil, raised his hat. Too agitated to think of appearances, the girl uttered a quick, glad exclamation, and held out both hands to him.

"Mr. Jones! is that you? Oh, can you tell me—I have only just come back—I have had no news for weeks. My sisters—how are they?" Her lips were so dry she could hardly articulate.

"Your—a—a—your sisters, Miss Hardy?" Little Jones,

who was one of the junior clerks in a mercantile house, was quite taken aback and flattered at this *empressé* greeting from a young lady who had hardly even before condescended to take any notice of him. "Oh, they are quite well, I think; perfectly so. I—I had the pleasure of seeing them both a few days ago in Martini's *confiteria*, and complimented them on their courage in staying here when so many have gone away. Miss Loo—a—a, Miss Luisa said she was keeping up her spirits on cakes, however! She was looking most charmingly."

"And—and *Lisbeth*—my eldest sister?" The street seemed turning round with Lil. She could not choose her words decorously to save her life.

"Oh, quite well too, though I did hear her say something to a friend, I believe, about having had a bad cold lately. I took the liberty," with a more confident smile, "of inquiring after you, knowing you to be absent; but they said nothing of expecting you back."

"No, they don't expect—they don't know now—that I am here, I mean," said Lil (very unnecessarily, as Max thought, for he saw the inquisitive glance wandering from Lil's ashen face and dishevelled appearance to himself, as he stood angry-looking and constrained at her side). The little clerk evidently thought the situation a romantic one.

"I am going to them as soon as I can get a *volante*," Lil went on quickly. "Yes, I can be good, and wait for it *now*," turning to Max with great, shining, self-forgetful eyes full of a dizzy gladness. "I don't think I could walk, after all. I—this news has made me feel quite silly." She staggered as she spoke, and Max put out his arm and almost lifted her into the agency. For a moment indeed he thought she would faint outright, for she was trembling all over, and young Mr. Jones got a chair and made eager proffers of assistance. Max repulsed them, however, with brusque hauteur, and in his most unpleasant manner, caused quite as much by a sense of embarrassment at his own position there as by anything else, but which sent the little clerk off with speed, and in a huffy and spiteful mood; and by the time Lil had drunk a glass of water, and rested a minute or two, her shattered nerves rallied a little, and she was ready and impatient to start.

But in those few minutes, and the intense revulsion of feeling which had accompanied them, a change had come over both Max and the girl. The journey, carried out at such risk, and in such grievous discomfort, uncertainty, and excitement, seemed all at once to have become almost absurd: certainly wholly unnecessary. The cholera might be ravaging Monte San Felipe; but the click of the billiard-balls in a

café opposite them sounded none the less gaily; nor was a lady giving any less careful choice to the collection of smartly-trimmed hats and mantillas in a milliner's shop. The very return, indeed, to shop-fronts, gas, and civilisation generally; the smug and dapper appearance of Mr. Jones; and the suggestion of Louie eating cakes and indulging in frivolous badinage in a confectioner's shop, gave a touch of burlesque to the situation which a moment before had been full of such agonising seriousness and suspense. Lil, indeed, was too utterly free from self-consciousness, or even that slight insincerity which poses to itself, to see anything but the joyous side of the matter; and, worn out as she was, her face shone with all its old sunshine, as, bursting into sudden laughter which startled her companion, she exclaimed:

"To think that they are *both* well, quite well and lively, and that we needn't have come after all! And that I have run away from Mrs. Logan, and disobeyed papa, and carried *you* off too—all for nothing! Oh, I am not sorry for myself, I am too happy at getting back; and I don't believe papa could scold me even if he were here. But think of the girls' faces when they see us; such wan, grimy ghosts as we must look, stealing in on them! And perhaps they will have guests too. What will Liz say? She'll be sure to put it down to 'one of

Lil's mad freaks', for how can she ever guess what that bad Louie's letter made me feel?"

Max looked greatly annoyed. The same idea had presented itself to him; and the prospect of marching into a well-lit, civilised drawing-room, and facing a couple of satirical young women—perhaps a number of well-dressed people into the bargain—all turning upon his haggard, unshaven, and dirty self those looks of surprise which he had already resented in Mr. Jones, was anything but pleasant to him. In bringing Lil safely to her home he had certainly performed a chivalrous action, and she would doubtless describe it as such; but to do so with proper effect he ought not to be present at the narration; nor certainly to wear so woe-begone and unchivalrous an aspect. Besides, at present she seemed disposed to make a joke of it herself. She was *at home* now, and her mind had already rushed on to her sisters and her own surroundings there, leaving him, who had done so much for her, on one side; and in the sensitiveness of wounded feelings, perhaps of wounded vanity, he startled Lil by announcing, as he put her into the carriage, that he would not accompany her to the house, but proceed to a hotel at once and get a bath and some food there.

"You have been so long separated from your sisters that it will be pleasanter for you to meet them by yourself; and

now that we know all is well, you really don't need me any more," he said, trying not to speak stiffly, but knowing that he did do so, and comforted in spite of himself by the sudden distress and concern blotting out all that brief gleam of sunshine in her face as she heard him. The sisters were *not* everything to her, after all, and she did want him; but having made his resolution he would not let even her persuasions turn him from it, and only so far yielded to them as to promise to join her again in a couple of hours when he had dined and rested.

"You will be *sure* to come. You will let them thank you too. *I* shall not rest or feel happy till you do," Lil cried, with that quick, tender instinct of hers for healing the mental wounds of those about her; and Max yielded. The unpleasant, constrained expression vanished from his face; and as the carriage drove off he was left wondering at how dark and dreary the street looked without that sweet face whose wistful smile was turned towards him to the last.

He little thought how soon the brightness on it would be gone; or that while he was entering the hotel to which the agency people directed him she was just alighting from the carriage, and gazing up in blank, bewildered terror at a silent, shuttered house, whose once gay and shining windows gave

back no sign of life, or even habitation; and on whose closed door—visible enough by the light of a great flaring pile of burning wood at the corner of the street—she saw the ghastly symbol of a *black cross!*

CHAPTER II.

AN EMBARRASSING SITUATION.

"Doors where my heart was used to beat."
In Memoriam.

"May I ne'er find grace,
When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer,
If one of her soft ringlets I displace;
Or look with ruffian passion in her face."
Keats (*'Eve of St. Agnes'*).

"A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly wealth for this,
To waste his whole soul in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips."—*Tennyson.*

FOR a moment Lil could not believe her eyes. A horrible fancy that fatigue and over-excitement had turned her brain, and that she was going mad: that this was not their house at all; or that the darkness, the silence, the air of uninhabited desolation were but figments of her own over-wrought imagination, came over her, and nearly forced a shriek from her lips; but in the same moment the driver of the *volante* bent down to her, and pointing to the door said:

"The Señorita has made a mistake—no? It is not *this*

house, the marked one, that she wants? Apparently, too, they are all dead there. Aye, truly, the Holy Virgin preserve us! and in the next one also. *Carrambo!* But the pest has been bad here!"

Lil looked round her piteously. It was all like a bad dream. The hour was shortly after seven in the evening. The sun had set, and in the sudden night which follows sunset in these regions, the first faint stars were beginning to twinkle in a sky of sapphire blue still flushed with purple on the western horizon. The familiar street along which she and her sisters had so often sallied forth in all the dainty coquetry of their afternoon attire lay before her: the house which only a year ago she had quitted for the first time since her childhood, the balcony where she had so often lounged and laughed and flirted in her giddier days; which she had expected now to see streaming with ruddy light—it was all there; but how silent, how changed, how dark! the houses opposite dark and silent, too; only a weird flickering light from that fire at the corner, and tufts of grass growing greenly between the paving-stones even in the middle of the street.

In an agony of terror, refusing to believe the foreboding forced upon her heart, she seized the knocker, and resolutely shutting her eyes against the dismal cross, knocked again and again at the door with a vigour and persistency which, how-

ever, met no answer; and her hand was just falling to her side from exhaustion, when a window in the house on the other side (one not marked with the fatal sign) opened, and an old woman's face became visible, pressed against the iron bars as she called out:

"Who is that? Any one for the señoritas Inglesas?"

"Yes, yes, one of the señoritas themselves!" cried Lil impetuously. She was almost fainting between agitation and despair. "Tell me what has happened. Where are the others—my sisters and old Juana? Oh! God help me, they cannot *all* be dead!"

"*Dead? Dios nos guarda!*[1] No; no one is dead," replied the woman, making her appearance now in the street, a decent, charwoman-looking body, with a large key in her hand; "but the señoritas are away. They left three days ago, for a visit somewhere, Juana told me; and she was to have stayed here in their absence; but the night before last she did not feel well; and in the morning she came round to me and said, 'Look here, I am so ill I can hardly move. If it is the cholera, I don't want to die here in an empty heretic house, which even the angels would not come to, but in my own *conventillo*[2] among my people. You are a woman of confidence, or you would not be taking care of the Señor

[1] Lord save us! [2] Negro courts in the city.

Pereira's house; so I will give you the key of this to guard for me. If I get well, I will come back for it in a couple of days; if not, you will know I am dead, and I rely on you to take it to the Consul Ingles. He is a great friend of the young ladies, and will repay you.' But, *Dios mio!*—she never expected one of you to return first," the woman exclaimed as she fitted the key into the door and threw it open; "and fortunate it is that I am still here; for I do not sleep at the Pereiras', but at my own house, and—*Carramba!* what is this?" (looking upwards at the cross, and beginning to indignantly rub it off). "The police are indeed in a hurry! They must have got wind of the servant being ill, and never even troubled to ask if it was cholera or not. Well, I do call it a shame, to mark a healthy house. No wonder the señorita was shocked."

Poor Lil was quite past speaking. The ghastly terror of the last few minutes, and now this undreamt-of climax to all her adventures and miseries, had undone the last remnant of her strength. She just managed to follow her portress into the *saguan*, but no further: her knees were tottering beneath her weight; and she only saved herself from fainting by sinking down on the lowest step of the stairs, up which, only a moment back, she had fancied herself flying with such joyous haste.

Fortunately the woman was kind. She saw that the poor girl was utterly overdone; and running back to her own quarters, returned in a minute with a lamp and a small bottle of cognac, from the latter of which she forced Lil to take a few drops, which had at least the effect of bringing a tinge of colour to her cheeks and lips. Then she helped her up-stairs, and into the dim, deserted sala, threw the windows open to admit the fresh evening air; and even paid (from Lil's purse) the coachman, who, being firmly convinced that his late charge had been attacked with cholera, was furiously impatient to depart. Finally, the good woman suggested that the señorita should lie still on the sofa, while she lit a fire and got her some food: a recommendation which the latter was too exhausted in mind and body to do anything but obey.

This at least she had never expected. To come home and find—*nothing*—no one! not the awfulness of death; not even the anguish and confusion of grievous illness, but—nothing! an empty house: her sisters gone away on a visit (but *where*, the woman could not tell her); her father in Europe; even Juana fled: not a face to greet her; not a voice to bid her welcome. It seemed more like a dream than ever to be lying there in the pretty, familiar-looking room, her aching head thrown back against an antimacassar her own

fingers had worked; Lisbeth's little table close by, with Lisbeth's fat little mother-o'-pearl album and company work-basket, all bows and fringes on it; her father's arm-chair which no one else ever dared to sit in, lest he should come to the door in his silent way, and seeing it occupied, stalk silent, still, but frowningly away, and not forget it—oh! for weeks and weeks; the old piano heaped with frayed and well worn music, which they had all hammered upon from the time their baby fingers could reach the keys; the books and photographs and pretty things, all in their old places, and all as well-known and dear to her as though they were living beings. To see all these, to be lying there in the midst of them, and *not* to see their owners; to hear no gay voices in the adjoining room, no burst of elfin laughter; not even the shuffling thud of Juana's slippered feet—it seemed *too* hard, too cruel and incredible to be true; and in her weariness and forlornness, the poor overwrought child burst into hysterical sobs, and cried bitterly.

She was roused by the return of the old woman, carrying a tray laden with hot coffee, toast, and eggs, which she had procured somewhere; and the partaking of which so far comforted and revived her that she was able to sit up and ask questions, which her attendant answered by launching into a vivid description of the state of things in the town.

According to her the pestilence *was* diminishing. It had been very bad, nothing but deaths on all sides; and in the older parts of the town down by the harbour the streets were far worse than this, nearly every house shut up; and in some cases four or five taken out dead from each; while, as for those who had fled from the city, and sought refuge in the pretty shady suburbs around, their case was even worse than that of those who remained behind; for they took the contagion with them, and without help of nurses or doctors (who were all up to their eyes in work in town), away from all their home comforts and even from druggists' shops and medicines, had perished in heaps, and been buried there among the roses and orange trees of the pretty quintas where they had so vainly sought refuge. Many were returning and reopening their houses in consequence of this; and now that the wind had changed, and there had been some rain to cool the air, there was a hope that the disease might be going away; but it was a *triste*, terrible time still, with nearly every one one met in black; and those fires, which the Government had lit at the corners of the streets with the idea of carrying off the pestilence, filling the air with black smoke like that of the *inferno* itself. For her part, she did not believe in them at all, and thought people had better say their prayers, and have masses said for the poor *difuntos*, instead of trying to

cross the will of Providence. And now, was there anything more she could do for the señorita before she left? for she had a sick child at home, and must be going to look after it.

Lil uttered a little cry of dismay.

"But you won't leave me by myself! I *could* not stay here alone all night, and I will pay you anything you like to ask," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, while the tears started afresh to her eyes, for a doubt had come over her now lest even Max should fail to keep his promise; and the idea of being abandoned to her own resources in this empty, mournful house, without a friendly voice, or even the sense of human companionship near to sustain her, was too terrible for her to contemplate.

The woman looked at her pityingly. It *was* hard for the señorita, she owned, so young and fragile-looking as she was, and evidently too tired to go to a friend's house that night. If it were not for her sick child she would have stayed and welcome, but—well, she would do what she could: go home and give him his medicine, and then return to the young lady for the night. Would that suit? Lil said yes, and thanked her. Indeed the fear of being left altogether had been so intense that she felt heartily grateful for the compromise; but when the woman was gone, and she was left by herself again, the ghostly, *haunted* feeling of the

empty house came over her again with such a sense of aching loneliness as brought the tears back once more; and to check them she had recourse, tired as she was, to going to and fro about the rooms, lighting candles in them all; and then brushing her hair and changing her dress, in the hope by one occupation or another to drive away thought till Max should come.

It was *that* she was waiting for: the hope of that which kept her up at all, and sent faint spots of colour to her cheek at every quick step upon the pavement outside. Max would make it better for her, tell her what to do, comfort her, and take care of her as he had done through all that long, long journey. *He* cared for her, even if there was no one else here to do so; and as the slow minutes passed and he did not come, the longing for him, the loneliness of those lighted, tenantless rooms; and the dread lest he might mistake the number and pass the house, so grew upon her, that she glided down the steep stone staircase, and seated herself in an angle of the steps, a little way from the bottom, where she could see the street outside and the passers-by, and yet be hidden from view herself, save when the lurid reflection from that funereal-like pile of flame at the corner lit up her lurking-place.

It was by that light that Max caught sight of her—her

white face and dress gleaming ghostlike in the weird and flickering glow; and his consternation at the vision thus presented was scarcely lessened by the cry of irrepressible joy and relief with which she sprang to greet him.

"*Alone!* Do you mean to say you are actually quite alone in the house, without even a servant?" he exclaimed, on hearing her explanation, and involuntarily drawing the slender, trembling form nearer to him. "You poor girl! This is too dreadful; and after all you had gone through!"

"Yes; and when I was so happy at knowing they were well; and thinking that in a few minutes we should be all together again!" said Lil, with a sob that she could not repress. "But now you are come I don't mind half so much. When I thought that perhaps you *might* not—but you are here, so that is over, and you will advise me what to do next; and I will give you a comfortable arm-chair, and some nice coffee—it is keeping hot for you now—and I dare say the old woman will soon be back. Oh! I am not going to be silly, and cry any more. It will be all right now you are here to take care of me."

She laughed a little as she said it. The fact was that she was simply hysterical with the past agitation and fatigue; and indeed there were tears even then behind the laughter; but their very presence lent a tenderer shine to her eyes; and

there was something in her fair pale face and bright hair, and in the broken accent of her sweet, tired voice as she stood under the lamplight in the sala looking up at him with most perfect innocent trust, that a man must have been less in love with her than Max to resist.

He would have given the world to have taken her then and there into his arms and kissed her face and lips and eyes a hundred times; and if they had been anywhere else, or *she* anything different, one shade *less* trustful and guileless, one whit less unprotected, save by his own honour, he must have given way to the temptation at all costs. As it was the struggle was a fierce one, and his muttered, "My poor sweet Lil, and I thought you would not *want* me! Thank Heaven I am of use to you!" was accompanied by such a pressure of the little hand clasped in his as almost forced a cry from the girl's lips.

He could not prevent her from installing him in her father's easy-chair, and waiting on him afterwards with delicious strong coffee, with which she served him in the prettiest way, disregarding altogether his remonstrances; and declaring that it was her turn to do something for him now in return for all he had done on the journey for her; but for all that, she was glad enough, the moment her hospitable duties were over, to pull a footstool to the window and sit down,

resting her fair head against the frame; and letting what faint breeze there was blow in upon her face. It was certainly an unusual situation for two young and handsome people in nowise connected with each other; and any one looking in on them, Max leaning back in his arm-chair and Lil seated almost at his feet, her head thrown back, her slender bare arms crossed lightly on her lap, resting in the mere sense of security afforded by his presence, and utterly unconscious of the rapt gaze of admiration with which he was regarding her, might well have taken them for a newly-married couple in the first weeks of their honeymoon. There was no one to look, however. The cholera king, which had been the means of leaving them there unchaperoned and uncompanioned, had driven away spying eyes and tattling tongues as well. The windows opposite were dark, the houses empty. The few footsteps passing up and down the street were far below, and audible quite a long way off in their rarity. There was no moon even; and only the pale red light of the decaying fires, and the voice of the watchman on his beat, crying out: "*Las onze anduda y sereno!*"[1] broke the absoluteness of their *tête-à-tête* with a reminder of neighbouring humanity. Lil started as the latter sound fell on her ears.

"*Eleven!* Is it really?" she exclaimed, "and that woman

[1] "*Eleven o'clock, and fine weather!*"

has not come back yet! She promised to return immediately. What shall I do if—if she doesn't come at all?"

"Don't let us fancy any such thing," said Max reassuringly. He was cool and comfortable now, resting pleasantly, and inclined to look on everything in an agreeable light. "Perhaps something has delayed her. Does she live near?"

"Quite near," she said; "but I forgot to ask her where, or even her name."

"And you don't know where your own servant is to be found? However, if you did, it wouldn't be safe to go after her, supposing she has the cholera. I don't see what you can do but wait for the other one's return; and pending that I do wish you would lie down on the sofa. You ought to have been in bed long ago. How worn out you must feel, you poor child!"

Lil looked up blushing a little, but grateful.

"Oh, no, I shall do well enough; I am much stronger than I look, and besides, I can't *let* myself knock up till I have found out where Liz and Loo are, and whether I have *any* friends left in town."

"If you have, I suppose you must go to them. You couldn't stay here by yourself till your sisters' return."

"I could go to the Beauchamps—our Consul's family, that is—perhaps, and I must certainly go and see them to-morrow:

but—Mr. Lorimer, I am afraid *you* are very tired. You look —I didn't see how pale you looked before; and you are only sitting up for me now; I am so sorry."

Max smiled at her reassuringly. The girl's face was so winning in its expression of tender, contrite concern, that the temptation to bend down and kiss it was stronger than ever; but he did manage to resist it, and by leading the conversation into other channels, helped her to forget the time till once again the mournful-sounding cry of the watchman piercing the soft air warned them of how it was creeping on.

Lil stood up quickly, her face flushed and anxious. "There! that is twelve, and she has not come. I feel certain now that she won't do so at all. Mr. Lorimer, what *shall* we do? It is no use waiting up here."

"You certainly can't go anywhere else at this hour," he said, rising and coming to her side; for the movement, by bringing her into the light, showed more plainly the extreme exhaustion written in every line of her young face, and in the wearied droop of her whole figure. "You can scarcely even stand, as it is."

Lil lifted her face and tried to smile at him.

"Yes," she said, a little falteringly; "I think I am too tired now to walk—far; and then, I don't know where to go

if I was not, only—what am I to do? I dare not stay here all alone, and you ought to get back to your hotel at once. I have been selfish in keeping you here so long."

"And I have been too happy in being here to want to be anywhere else in the world," said Max, fervently. He took hold of her hands, which she was nervously twisting and untwisting in her dilemma, and gently pushed her back into the arm-chair from which he had risen while he continued to speak. "Please remember that I am a man, and a man who has dined well, rested himself thoroughly, and is as fresh as paint: quite fresh enough to walk up and down the street outside your door for the little that remains of the night. Lil, may I do that? Would it make you feel safe and enable you to sleep? You would know you were being taken care of all the time then; and in the morning——"

"Oh! no, no. How can you talk of such a thing? As if I would let you!" cried Lil, the tears rushing into her eyes; then with a sudden brightening in them, as though she saw a solution of their difficulties—"But I have thought of another way, if you wouldn't mind. Would you—do you think you could manage to sleep *here?* I would not have asked you under any other circumstances, for I know you would be ever so much more comfortable at the Oriental; but if you didn't mind putting up with Louie's room for one night, I would

try my best to make you comfortable; and it would be so kind to me. I know it is very cowardly: but—but I shouldn't dare to go to bed if I were left all alone here. I should be afraid. Do you think you *could?*"

Max could not help starting a little, and casting a quick glance of inquiry at her. The same idea had flashed through his own mind; so far at any rate as the suggestion that the best thing for both Lil and himself would be for her to go to bed and sleep off her fatigue as best she could, while he curled himself up on the sofa or in the arm-chair, and combined a moderate amount of rest with keeping guard over her in that manner. The vision of Mrs. Grundy, however, had made him dismiss the notion unuttered, and with a mental "D— it! no, I suppose that *wouldn't* do," and he was therefore proportionately surprised when Lil made the proposal herself, and in such a simple, matter-of-fact manner, blushing a little, indeed, when she alluded to his probable discomfort; but evidently with no more *arrière pensée* in her mind, no shadow of propriety qualms in the innocent, straightforward gaze of her sweet blue eyes, than if he had been her brother or (his own cheek burnt, and he was conscious of a quick heart-leap at the thought) her husband.

"Would you really like me to do that?" he said, angry with himself for the flush on his face and discomposure in his

mind when she was so calm; and yet half-vexed with her, too, for being so. If she had cared for him as he thought she did she *couldn't* be so cool, he told himself; and yet after all it was much the best thing he could do. It would be brutal to leave her, a young girl, alone in that ghastly, forsaken house; and if she saw no harm in his remaining, why should he be such a prig as to suggest it to her? In England, of course, it would have been out of the question; but then, in England it would have been equally so for a handsome young man and woman in good society to be sitting together at nearly one o'clock at night, in a house with no one else in it. People in this country were different, and less squeamish, and much pleasanter they were for it—if they didn't belong to you, that is, and at the present moment he had not made up his mind that Lil was to belong to him: that his love for her was of the sort to compel him in his circumstances to ask her to be his wife. A few hours ago, indeed, when that sweet head of hers had rested against his shoulder in the *diligencia*, he had no doubts about the matter; and even now, the mere idea that it might so lean on any other man, that she could ever turn to some one else for comfort and protection as she had turned to him, seemed to turn every drop of blood in Max's veins to fire, and make him feel as if he would rather kill her then and there than suffer such an outrage to be.

But after all it was not likely. It was only because he *was* himself that she trusted him with such sweet security; and, by heaven! he would be the veriest blackguard if he gave her cause by look or scruple on his side to make her fancy she was wrong: so when in answer to his question, she said, "Indeed I would, if you are sure you don't mind doing without hotel luxuries, and can put up with this place," he made haste to thank her, and to say that he hated hotels, and that it was the best and most sensible idea she could have come to; for he should be spared a long walk, and should be up bright and early in the morning, and able to do anything for her she might want: after all, it was only carrying out his promise to Mrs. Logan to take care of her late guest, until he could deliver her into better hands.

He said this, however, holding both of hers in his own, as, after locking up the house together, and putting out the lights, she stood to bid him good night at the door of the room he was to occupy; and Lil looked up at him, a reproachful flash in her sweet, tired eyes.

"I don't know where *they* are!" she said, a little brokenly. "Mr. Lorimer, how very kind you are! No one ever took such care of me in all my life as you have done. I do hope you will rest well after it. Good night."

And then Max kissed her: not her lips, he had just

strength to refrain from that; but on the parting just above her smooth white brow. A man must have been made of iron to do less.

Tired as he was it was some time before sleep came to him. Certain slight sounds of moving about in the adjoining room had shown him that Lil was not far from him—was lying awake, perhaps, in all that fair, fragile loveliness which it made his pulses throb even to think of; or slumbering peacefully under the shield of an innocence almost incredible in his eyes: slumbering with only the slight division of a partition-wall and a door, which might be locked or unlocked (for very shame of himself he would not look), between them.

He had never been in such a situation in all his life before.

CHAPTER III.

"YOU KNEW YOU HAD NO BUSINESS THERE!"

"With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances."
As You Like It, Act II. Scene vii.

"On ne donne rien si libéralement que ses conseils."
La Rochefoucauld.

"Every man humiliates himself who for a moment even allows the woman he has chosen to be lightly esteemed."—*Muloch.*

"I BEG your pardon, Mr. Lorimer, for interrupting you; but something escaped you just now—it was doubtless a mistake: must have been one, I am sure. You had been speaking of Miss Hardy's distress at finding an empty house on her return home; and of her being too unwell to call on me herself this morning. You have been to see her then already, I suppose? It is not possible (excuse me for even suggesting the question) that *you*—passed the night there!"

Max bit his lip and coloured fiercely. It was Mr. Beauchamp, the Consul-General, who was speaking, leaning back in his arm-chair, with the very pointed tips of his very white and

well-shaped fingers pressed together, and his eyes looking straight into his visitor's face from under a pair of exceedingly bushy eyebrows; while Max sat facing him very uncomfortably, and feeling that of all the disagreeable men he had ever met, H. B. M.'s Consul for Monte San Felipe was the worst.

For one thing, instead of receiving him with the delight and *éclat* due to a handsome and highly-cultured young man of good birth and position, who had not only condescended to leave the social delights of civilised Europe for this savage and pestilential country, but had made himself known to the humble representative of Her Majesty there, with that delightful air of half-patronising, half-graceful ease, which, however unappreciated by boorish estancieros, was ever ready to crop out at the slightest notice, Mr. Beauchamp had met him with a matter-of-course curtness, scarcely even polite, and implying that he knew all about the young man already, and was not inclined to be enamoured of the knowledge.

"Mr. Lorimer? Oh, ah, yes. Take a chair, if you please. There are some letters waiting for you. I thought you would have called before," was his first greeting. "Casa Blanca, did you say? Yes, I know Mr. Logan of Casa Blanca very well, and saw him about six weeks ago, when he gave me to understand that you were at his estancia, but would follow him up to town in a day or two; as soon, in fact, as some

slight hurt to your leg had healed. Apparently it has taken longer in doing so than he expected."

"My leg has been well for some time, I thank you, sir," said Max haughtily; "but having stayed at the estancia for my own convenience while it was healing, I continued to do so afterwards at Mr. Logan's request, and to afford the protection of my presence to—to the ladies of his family. My errand to you at present is on behalf of one of them;" and then he proceeded to narrate the circumstances of Lil's return, and of the desolate situation in which she had found herself with an empty house, her father in Europe, and her sisters gone, whither she did not know.

"She was coming to you herself," he wound up by saying; "but the fatigue of the journey in this scorching weather, and the excitement and anxiety attending its finish, has completely upset her: and she was so prostrated with nervous headache this morning that she could scarcely speak even to give me your address. The old woman has fortunately returned; but she ought to have some one else—some lady with her; and she thought that your wife——"

But Mr. Beauchamp hastened to say that his wife and family were at a quinta in the country, and that, as two of the children were down with the measles, it would not be a safe house for other young people to come to. Neither did

he seem at all sympathetic with regard to poor Lil's situation; but implied very clearly that he considered it a just punishment for undertaking the journey she had done. It was the most *extraordinary* idea he had ever heard of, and the most romantic and imprudent. To leave a healthy and comfortable house at a time when most people would have been only too grateful for such a refuge, and rush into the midst of a cholera-stricken city, without even waiting to ascertain whether the rest of her family had left it, without communicating with them beforehand, or securing a proper and suitable protector (Max flushed up angrily and tried to speak, but Mr. Beauchamp went on without looking at him). He really wondered that Mrs. Logan should have given her sanction to such a proceeding. It seemed incredible to him, and he must own that he had almost declined to believe the narrator when informed late last night that Miss Lilian Hardy had just been seen in the street (so little Jones *had* babbled, Max thought,) in company with a young man, not a resident in the place, and in a condition of—well, to be plain, manifesting such extreme agitation at the encounter as naturally left a very peculiar impression on the person in question. It was a comfort now to hear that the young lady *had* returned to her own home; but really——

"Really, sir," Max broke in with infinite disgust and

wrath, "I don't know what your tone means in the least, or what all this you are saying has to do with *me!* That a young lady should look somewhat unlike her usual self, and appear both agitated and exhausted after two days of incessant travelling in a vehicle not fit to hold swine, and in the most cruel suspense as to the safety of her sisters, for whose succour she was risking her own life, seems to me not only perfectly natural, but calculated to rouse the sympathy of any right-feeling person. The journey itself may have been imprudent: I think it was, though I had nothing to do with it; but it was undertaken from the noblest and most unselfish motives; and as to the 'seemliness' of her protector——"

"My dear Mr. Lorimer, I beg you won't excite yourself," said the old Consul testily. "I hadn't the slightest intention so far to animadvert on your conduct in this matter. You are a stranger to me and to Miss Hardy's family, and, as my friend Logan tells me, only a recent acquaintance of the young lady herself."

Max was understood to say something about "not so *very* recent."

"It is only, therefore, because you have chosen to constitute yourself her messenger that I have even alluded before you to the extreme imprudence involved in leaving a home provided for her by her father, and coming up to town with

a young man like yourself. You are not aware, perhaps, that before leaving South America, Mr. Hardy specially confided his daughters to my care, mentioning at the same time that it was his wish that . . . ahem! Lilian should remain at the Estancia Logan till his return."

"But—good God, sir!" Max exclaimed, "you wouldn't have *had* her remain there when she got letters informing her that one of her sisters was very ill, and the other in a state of the greatest alarm and anxiety, all their friends away, and——"

"Pooh, pooh, Mr. Lorimer! Both girls have been in the most blooming health, except for a slight cold which one of them had a fortnight ago. Why, it is barely three days since they looked in here in the highest spirits to bid me good-bye, before leaving for Buenos Ayres."

"Then, sir, I think it is a pity they should have so causelessly put their sister to such cruel anxiety and fatigue," said Max sternly. "And I must add that I think, if even you, who have so little sympathy with her, could have seen the state she was in last night, her distress at finding herself alone in that empty house, her alarm and exhaustion,"—he was fairly launched now, and was in the middle of a regular tirade on Lil's sufferings, when the Consul interrupted him in the way I have recorded at the commencement of this chapter.

Max stopped abruptly, and felt as if he would have liked to knock him down, all the more because, put in such a way, and in such a tone of incredulous surprise, the question did not seem to admit of any other answer, certainly not of so righteous and high-handed a one as the others had done. Last night, indeed, he had asked himself what need there was for him to stand upon small conventionalities in a country of semi-civilised barbarians, who, if they heard of a breach of etiquette, wouldn't know it was one; but the argument somehow seemed to lose its force when he was seated in the well-furnished, private office of this extremely proper, white-whiskered, and decorous-looking old gentleman; and he lost his head so far as to stammer out:

"Well, sir, I,—Miss Hardy asked me to do so, and—and in her nervous state it would have been brutal——"

Mr. Beauchamp rose to his feet, his irritation so great as to overpower all his usual civility.

"*Brutal!* Nonsense! I never heard of such rubbish. Mr. Lorimer, I have every wish to show you all the courtesy in my power; not only because as a British subject you have a right to expect it from me, but because I have received by this mail a letter from your step-father, Colonel Duncan, a gentleman whom I had the pleasure of knowing in bye-gone years, asking me to extend to you any kindness or guidance

in my power." (Max Lorimer's teeth met with a fierce click. He understood *now* the Consul's "tone".) "He tells me—you must excuse me under the present circumstances for mentioning it—that he was compelled to urge you to leave England for a time in consequence of certain lamentable indiscretions, some of which were—were not unconnected with women, in fact. Well, well, Mr. Lorimer, there is nothing very much in that. Many young men have been fast in their early days, and, being pulled up in time, have reformed and become steady members of society; but to go on with that sort of thing in another country, and one in which the English community is so small that no irregularities can escape notice; to take advantage of a stranger's hospitality, encourage an impulsive girl in a most foolish and thoughtless freak, and then place her in a position from which you can escape by pleading her invitation for an act which may be ruinous to her—why, I never heard of such a thing: you and she alone in a house all night! A girl of her youth and beauty—enough to destroy her reputation for ever! Can't think what she could have been dreaming of to allow it! Thank God she is not *my* daughter!" Mr. Beauchamp had become almost incoherent, and Max was boiling over.

"Upon my word, sir, I thank you for your good opinion of me. To whom I am indebted for it is of course plain;

and as you know nothing about me in reality, and I am not in the least likely to ask for either 'guidance or kindness' from you after this morning, it is a matter of indifference to me whether you change or retain it. One accusation, however, I emphatically deny. I have never taken an ungentlemanly advantage of any man's hospitality in my life; and I am sorry you, who know Miss Hardy, should think so lightly of her womanly purity and innocence as to suppose even the worst man could fail to be impressed by it, or could presume by the slightest disrespect or license——"

"Pshaw! pshaw! my dear fellow, who is talking of disrespect or license?" the old gentleman interrupted testily. "Do *you* suppose that if I thought there was anything of that—that you were a blackguard, in fact—that I should be standing here talking to you at all? *Gentlemen* don't descend to those depths, I hope; and, being one myself, I should be a fool as well, if, looking at you, I could suppose you capable of doing so; but people who *aren't* gentlemen might suppose it; and where I hold you inexcusable is that you've given them leave to do so. If Lilian Hardy was too young and ignorant to know what she was doing, you, who are a man of the world, were not. You *knew* you had no business there; that it was better a thousand times that she

should be left to be a little nervous or lonely for a few hours than that it should get about—or that you yourself should be able to say—that she was shut up in that house with you, and her good name perhaps be damaged for life in consequence. Yes, yes, Mr. Lorimer, it's all very well to protest; but I've been a young man myself, and I know that young men look on an adventure of this sort as a bit of fun, and something to boast of among their fellows, especially when the girl concerned is notoriously pretty, and not one in whom they, as mere birds of passage like yourself, could be expected to take a serious interest. Even if her father were here——"

But Max would listen no longer.

"Her father!" he repeated passionately. "Let me tell you before you go any further, Mr. Beauchamp, that I take a more serious interest in Miss Hardy than you or any other man can do; and that, so far from needing her father to defend her good name, the person who dares to assail, or so much as breathe a syllable against it, will find that he has to answer to me for the insult; and, by Heaven, I'll make him suffer for it."

Mr. Beauchamp looked startled.

"Hush! hush! this is making matters worse, Mr. Lorimer. For you to take up the cudgels for Miss Hardy would only lead people to think——"

"What is the truth—that I have the right to do so; the right every man has of defending the honour of the woman he means to make his wife."

"Your .... My dear young fellow, this is madness. You don't know what you are saying. I have been blaming you for an imprudence which might injure a young lady; but I am afraid I have gone too far. There is certainly no need——"

"For me to marry Miss Hardy? Thank you, Mr. Beauchamp; I am quite aware of that, except so far as my happiness feels the need of such a woman to complete it."

"But, my dear Mr. Lorimer— Come, come, you can't have had time to think of this. Remember, you've only been a few weeks in this country, and in England you have a good position and good prospects to keep up; while, though Lil Hardy is a very pretty and charming girl, I must tell you—well, to be frank, the connection is not one that your family——"

"Mr. Beauchamp, in making any woman my wife I marry herself, not her connections. My family have nothing to do with me in such a matter; and as to my position and prospects, so long as they are good enough to satisfy *her*, that is all I require of them."

Max had passed the rubicon now—that rubicon which

only last night he had scarcely made up his mind to approach; and he spoke standing up, and with a fire and decision which, in connection with his handsome, aristocratic features and ringing voice, carried an unmistakable impressiveness with it. As for Mr. Beauchamp, who was not only aristocratic to the backbone himself, but a man cast originally very much in the same mould as the youngster he had been lecturing, his face wore an expression of mingled annoyance and admiration, to which by degrees relief was superadded. Of all things in the world he hated responsibility, and a Consul has more laid on him at all times than any other man under the sun. It was this which made him so angry at the first news of Lil's escapade, for he felt that in some way he would be dragged into the matter; and though rather fond of the girl for her pretty face and manner, and from having known her since she was a baby, was by no means desirous of having to fight her battles for her, or defend a reputation which her own imprudence had endangered. Max's present announcement, however, was one which he hardly knew whether to be pleasant or not. Of course it would be an excellent thing for Lil Hardy to be married, and the sooner the better if there was any fear of this foolish incident getting about; while there was no denying that a young man even in Max Lorimer's present position was as good

a match as Mr. Hardy could expect for one of his daughters. Nay, it did cross the Consul's mind that, since receiving Colonel Duncan's letter, the thought had entered him whether the prodigal step-son (if reformed and presentable in other respects) might not be found worthy of one of the Miss Beauchamps; but the remembrance of this only brought the colour to his hollow, white-whiskered cheeks, and he said, somewhat confusedly:

"Well, Mr. Lorimer, this is naturally rather startling news to me. I had certainly no idea that you were engaged to Miss Hardy, and I must own it makes this little affair appear in rather a different light. Not that you ought to have been there last night, you know, all the same. That, I'm afraid, no one could approve of; still, if Lil, poor child" (he felt he might afford to drop the formal "Lilian" now, and was decidedly more comfortable for it), "if she was as ill and frightened as you say, I don't doubt you did find it hard to leave her; and I can make allowance for your feelings even though they did lead you into a decided imprudence. I am sure, however, that you will be additionally careful now not to let a whisper of it get abroad; for——"

"Thank you, sir," said Max haughtily, "but I think you may safely leave that to me. So long as *you* are silent——"

"Ah, yes, yes, my dear fellow"—Mr. Beauchamp did not

like being either interrupted or snubbed, and was not sorry to pay the youngster out in his own coin—" but, fortunately for Miss Hardy, there is no doubt of that; while *I* should never have known of it if you had not let it out yourself: but there! I'm not going to be hard on you," as Max winced and coloured hotly; "and you in return ought to be the last man to bear me malice for any severe words I may have let drop in the beginning of our interview. You must remember that in her father's absence, and since she has left our friends the Logans, I stand '*in loco parentis*' to the young lady of whom we have been talking; and that I am therefore bound to take an affectionate interest in her. By the way, you cannot of course tell whether Mr. Hardy is likely to give his consent to this?"

"Of course not," said Max, "seeing that I have never met him; but——"

"Well, well, I don't exactly know what his views are; and she is a very pretty girl, and has, I believe, refused one or two offers already. The fact is, young ladies are so much scarcer and more precious with us here than in the old country, that we poor fathers find it very difficult to keep our daughters to ourselves twelve months after they're out of the nursery, but from what I know of your position, &c., and taking it for granted that marriage means settling down with

you, I should not think he would refuse his consent, to an engagement at any rate."

Max bowed. He found it extremely hard to be gracious, or to look like anything but a very much injured prince of the blood-royal; but Mr. Beauchamp went on quite amicably: "And it will be some time before her sisters can hear about her either; for they are staying at different places, one at an estancia on the Argentine side of the river, and the other somewhere else. The thing is to find out where Miss Lil can go in the mean time; or if there is any one who can stay with her. Nearly every one has run away from town since this cholera panic: but she mustn't be left alone, of course. One must find some proper chaperon for her. I needn't point that out to you."

"Scarcely, I think, seeing that it was to urge that fact on you, that I took the liberty of calling here at all this morning!" said Max, not ill pleased to have got in a shot at his late enemy. "You said, however, that you——"

"Ah, yes, yes, that she couldn't come to us on account of these abominable measles—never do for her to get them, you know—or else of course Mrs. Beauchamp and all of us would be delighted. I'll come and see her this afternoon, however, and talk it over: give her a good scolding for running away from Jack Logan's, and getting engaged without asking

leave; and, by the way, I know a great friend of hers, a Miss Madrèra, who is in town. I'll send a messenger to ask her to go and see the poor girl at once."

"Thank you, sir. Miss Hardy will be much obliged to you. In that case I need take up your time no longer, as I have a good deal of business of my own to attend to," with which, and rejecting an invitation to come back to lunch at the Consulate, Max shook hands, rather more cordially than he had done before, and took his departure.

It was not to attend to any *business*, however, that he hurried away, but to get back to the house where Lil was waiting for him, with all the speed possible. What he would have done had the Consul proposed to go there at once he scarcely dared to think; for after the step he had so boldly taken, it was absolutely necessary for him to see Lil first, and secure from her the consent which, in announcing his engagement, he had somewhat rashly taken for granted. He did not much doubt that she would give it. That one look in her sweet eyes, when he told her he was going with her in the *diligencia*, had said plainly enough what he was to her; but now that he had irretrievably committed himself, he could not forget that looks are not everything, that she had said no word afterwards which could justify him in assuming the position he had done; but by her very sim-

plicity and trustfulness had made it apparent that she only looked on him as the friend and brother whom he had been so long representing. Last night, indeed, there had been something consoling in this very thought; but to-day the mere idea that it might be so, or that she might refuse to accept him in the light in which he had described himself, nearly maddened him; and as he hastened along with flushed face and set lips under the full glare of the noonday sun, Spaniards looking out at him from under awninged shop-fronts or darkened porticos, shrugged their shoulders contemptuously and muttered:

"*Otro Ingles loco*[1] making love to cholera and sunstroke! What barbarians they are!"

[1] Another mad Englishman.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH MAX LORIMER GETS HIS WAY, AND THE THOUGHTS OF MANY MINDS ARE REVEALED.

"Qu'il serait doux d'aimer si l'on aimait toujours!"—*Scuderi.*

"There dwells no fear with love."—*Mrs. Hemans.*

"Ah! wad some God the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as ithers see us!"—*Burns.*

LIL was expecting him anxiously, and certainly no more absolute contrast could have been found than that presented by the state of mind peculiar to the two young people at this moment. The acute, nervous headache from which the girl had been suffering earlier in the morning had passed away, leaving in its stead that delicious sense of rest and languor so often following on the mere cessation of bodily pain; while from mental anxieties or disquiet she was as absolutely free as she was from any suspicion of how her name had been first perilled and then saved. Her sisters were safe and well, and Max was even then gone to ascertain their whereabouts. The old woman had returned early in the

morning full of apologies for having allowed her child's illness to detain her the night before; and bringing with her a strapping niece as a temporary servant. The day was fine, with a fresh breeze off the sea; and the sight of the dark blue waves dotted over with slender-rigged merchant craft rocking to and fro on their foam-frayed ridges was in itself exhilarating to her. She was even beginning to feel rested. She had no fear of the cholera; and as to Max, so far from his presence with her being a disturbing element in her mind, the mere thought of him brought with it a delicious sense of joy and contentment, which even in the midst of her other agitations last night had been the means of lulling her into peaceful slumbers at the very time when he was lying awake feverish and tossing with disturbed imaginations of her.

Women—young and innocent women in particular—are so different from men in these matters that it is no wonder if the latter fail to comprehend them. To a man love is only the first step to desire and possession: the promise which seeks, or at best expects fulfilment; but to the virgin woman neither desire nor possession have any meaning; and love in itself is the fulfilment of all things: the crown and completion of life, asking nothing and lacking nothing; so that when she is in love, and knows, or fancies herself beloved, she possesses in that one thought the summit and fullness

of all her desire, and craves nothing but to be undisturbed in it.

Lil *felt* that Max Lorimer loved her. That one whispered sentence when their eyes met, and those caresses, slight and gentle as they were (so slight and gentle that he, coward-like, had half hoped she might be unconscious of them), had convinced her of the fact, and she was perfectly happy in it: all the more so since she knew that she loved him in return. Formerly it might not have been so. Max then had vexed and puzzled her, and made her feel nervous and ill at ease both with herself and him; but since Mr. Logan's departure from Casa Blanca his gentleness and self-restraint had quite altered her opinion of him, and given rise to the feeling of affectionate trust and confidence which formed the chief elements in her happiness now. She did not even seek to know what manner of love his was for her, or to what it would lead. In old times she had discussed these questions freely enough with regard to men she did not love; but now her own feelings lent a sacredness to this one which inclined her to bury it within her bosom, and not even seek to look at or examine it. If Max ever said anything more, anything which she would have to answer, or tell to Liz and Loo, it would be different; but supposing he never did, supposing that his love for her—aye, even that kiss, the memory of which dyed

her cheek with sweetest, shamefaced pinks—was only a brother's love, a brother's caress—what wrong would be done? She would still belong to him, and he to her, by that tenderest, subtlest bond of mutual sympathy and understanding: the bond which was to make both better and both happier for all the rest of their lives.

It was this thought which was in her mind when Max entered, and she started up to meet him with a glad welcoming look which paled a little as their eyes met, and she saw in him a curious change and constraint. Her heart was still, however, too much with her sisters for her to attribute it to anything but bad news of them; and Max was obliged to make haste to reassure her.

"Your sisters are quite well, and staying with friends on the other side of the river," he said quickly. "Here is Miss Hardy's address; but as it is some outlandish estancia, you must expect some few days to pass before you can communicate with each other; but—" and then he proceeded to give her Mr. Beauchamp's message respecting his proposed visit, and that of a Miss Madrèra, at hearing of which Lil clapped her hands joyously. "The Miss Madrèras! Why hadn't she thought of them before! They were sure not to have left the city, and of course they would come to her. How delightful it would be to see their dear old yellow faces again,

and hear all that had been happening in their absence! Well, it was very horrid of Liz and Loo to have gone off so far; but now that she knew all was well with them, that mattered little, and of course they would come back or send for her to join them as soon as ever they heard from her. And oh! how did Max like Mr. Beauchamp? Wasn't he a fine-looking old gentleman, just like the pictures of the Duke of Wellington?"

Max got quite hot and angry. To see the girl whom only an hour before he had left lying back on the couch, a white embodiment of pain and patience, barely able to speak or do more than give him a faint, grateful smile, now sitting up, bright, happy, and animated, and full of eager talk respecting a number of people of whom he knew nothing and cared nothing, seemed to put her away from him, as it were, and open a gulf between them which made the chivalrous step he had taken seem more than ever rash and imprudent. It was absolutely necessary for him to put it to the test, however, and the sooner the better, as he could not tell how rapidly this Miss Madrèra—confound her!—might follow on his heels; and he interrupted her at last in a tone whose sharp pain and irritation acted as a sudden damper on Lil's pleasant excitement.

"You talk of your sisters sending for you. Would you be

glad then if they did? Would you *like* to go to them, to go away?"—"*from me*," his eyes added, and Lil understood them, and stopped short with a world of swiftly-startled distress in her tone which answered for her. No; of course she would not like that; but how could she *say* so! Her heart was beating fast, and Max bent forward and looked her in the eyes.

"Lil," he said more softly, "have you forgotten what I said to you in the *diligencia* when you talked of my leaving *you*, and I told you—Lil, do you remember what I told you?"

A slow flush like the crimson stain of dawn was creeping over Lil's face, and her eyes were wide and humid.

"Yes, I—remember," she said, but so low that scarce any ears save those of a lover could have heard. Max came nearer still; his clasped hands rested on her knees and enclosed one of hers.

"And—is it nothing to you? Dearest, I would not press you then, or say another word—though God knows it was hard enough to keep still—for fear I should frighten you, or seem to be taking an unfair advantage when you were away from all your friends, and alone with me. But now that it is different—now that you are safe at home, and don't need me any longer, won't you reward me by one word? Lil, darling,

you know how I love you, with all the strength and passion of my life; won't you lift those sweet eyes to mine, and tell me you care just a little for me too: that—you *like* me to love you!" He was on his knees beside her now, with his arms firmly clasped round her slender, swaying figure. He could feel the trembling in each supple limb, and the rapid beating of her heart, and as he spoke he loosened one hand and ventured to put it under her chin and turn her face towards him. The next moment it was hidden against his breast, and he was kissing her passionately, brow and eyes and flower-red lips, even as he had dreamt of kissing her last night.

"My darling, my wife!" he said brokenly. "You *are* mine now. I shall take care of you all my life; and no one else shall ever come between us. Lil, love — kiss me!"

And at that moment the sound of two hands clapped sharply together, and an exclamation, beginning cheerfully and ending in a faint shriek fell on their ears:

"*Ave Maria!* But——*Lila mia!!!*"

Doña Carmelita was standing in the doorway!

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LETTER I.

"*From* DOÑA CARMELA, FILOMENA, MARIA DEL PILAR MADRERA:
To DOÑA PETRONA, JESUSA, MARIA, JOSEPHA MADRERA,
à la Quinta de Los Ombus
El Bucco.

"*Mi querida* PETRONITA,—There was no help for it! I knew well you would believe me mad; but demand of yourself what else I was to do! You are already aware from our friend Madame Beauchamp of poor Lila Hardy's journey to town in consequence of that little monkey of a Luisa having written to say that either she or Lisa were dying of the cholera. Rely yourself on me, my dear sister, that child will come to no good, and you and I will live to see it. Well, when I received our dear Señor Beauchamp's letter saying, 'Lila Hardy is at home, quite alone, and ill, no servant even, and a young fellow she has got engaged to hanging about the place. Will you go to her?' I said to myself: 'But assuredly I will. Lila, whom we love so much, engaged! Truly that is delightful news. I fly to congratulate her, and put myself at her disposition, since, as she cannot of course receive her *novio* alone, she must be longing for some friend of discretion and delicacy to lend them the protection of her presence.' With this thought I flew, expecting, I own, to see the *joven*[1] parading himself up and down beneath the balcony after the manner of young men in love; but no! no one was in the street, and I ascended the stairs, and entered the corridor. The sala door was open, and hearing voices within I thought to myself,

[1] Young man.

'la Lila has other visitors already,' and so gave the customary signal and entered——*Dios de mi alma!*—what were my feelings at finding Lilita not merely *alone* with her lover; but positively (scarcely can I write the words, only that I know that you will burn them as soon as read), positively in his arms, and in the act of kissing him! *Kissing* him without even the presence of a duenna (!)—Petrona, my sister, is it necessary to say more? And yet the most extraordinary part of this deplorable scene has yet to be told, namely, that though somewhat embarrassed at my appearance, neither of these young people appeared to be in the least ashamed of their conduct: Lila indeed flying at me, kissing and embracing me, and then beginning to cry, as she declared, for mere pleasure; though I could well hope that a sentiment of awakened delicacy was at the root of the emotion. But verily the English are an extraordinary race, and it is not possible to judge them by the morals of our purer nation. As for the young man, he took his departure after a few words, including a farewell with Lila on the staircase, and I saw him no more. Truly a handsome youth, as you will say when you see him, and of an air *muy distinguido*,[1] but with manners the most deplorable,—extremely proud, short, and wanting in all graciousness and politeness. I could see that la Lilita, dear girl, was afflicted lest he should have offended me, but—*Carrambo!* we have seen too much of these young barbarians before now to be capable of that folly; and, after all, their manners soon mend themselves after they have had the advantage of residing for a short space

[1] Highly distinguished.

in our civilised country. It is not given to every one to be a Spaniard, and one must have pity on the less fortunate.

"Lila's manners at any rate were unchanged. She was as charming and caressing as ever, and told me at once that she was betrothed to the gentleman I had seen, and that he was a Don Maximiliano Loréma, newly arrived from England, as I expected, but some one better and nobler than anybody who had ever come to this country before (possibly then a *duca*, as that, I believe, is the highest rank of nobility in England?): also that he had been a veritable angel to her in her exile and troubles, of which she told me, weeping afresh at the remembrance of them; whereupon seeing how hysterical the *povresita*[1] appeared, and remembering that even *ducas* are men, and that angels have fallen, being tempted, I then and there told her she must leave that house and come to Isabella and me. Now that you know all you will not blame me; for how could a woman of character like myself leave this imprudent but innocent one to the society of the Duca de Loréma? while at the same time, it is, as you are aware, impossible for me to forsake our Isabella in your absence, and more especially as we are absolutely servantless: that godless little Dolores having gone home on pretence of a stomach-ache last week, and never returned.

"Yet how to entertain a visitor under these circumstances, an English girl too, the appetites of whom are proverbial, and in our unfortunate circumstances, which we have always

[1] Poor little thing.

been so scrupulous to hide from the world! *Ay de mi!* my heart sank at the idea even as I proposed it, though I thought then that it would only be for a couple of days till either her sisters or some other friends claimed her. Alas! since then an accident has happened to that ever troublesome Luisita which detains the former in Buenos Ayres, while this sudden bursting out afresh of the cholera, just as it seemed to be dying away, has hindered many people from returning to town just as they were about to do so; though indeed the dear Lila declares, with inconvenient affection, that if all the world were here she would rather be with us than any one. Ah, if it were in the days when we had the whole house and a troop of servants, how welcome she would be; and indeed, if I could but feel secure that she wants for nothing, and will not discover the fact that we have no servant whatever (a revelation which would kill me with shame), she would be welcome now as the flowers and sunshine which she resembles.

"Hitherto she has not suspected it; for, as in your absence I sleep across the doorway of our Isabella's room, la Lila has our room to herself; and under pretence that we keep late hours, and that it is not good for *nuestra santa* to be disturbed by noise or moving about, I manage to retain her in bed till I have swept the rooms, marketed, and prepared breakfast. After that meal Lila goes into the sick-room and entertains our invalid, who has taken a surprising affection for her, and delights in her company; then Don Maximiliano arrives (figure to yourself the inconvenience of a lover in the morning!), and they sit in the sala—I necessarily present

—till she sends him away. His manners do not improve, and this is the most difficult part of the day; for though longing to get on with that embroidered gown, which I hope will help to pay for this visit, I cannot be so impolite as to do it in his presence, and I pity Lila for having to entertain so taciturn and morose a cavalier as this handsome young savage. Then she goes to take her siesta, which I insist on, and I prepare the dinner, and a little boy who cleans the steps and does such hard work for me, comes in to serve and remove the dishes. Alas! it goes to my heart to let him do it; for he has already spilt one excellent soup on the floor, and broken two plates; but what can one do! If I were to rise myself, she would guess immediately that there was no other servant; and the humiliation to the honour of our family would be more than I could bear. Fortunately I can wash up and arrange the rooms for the night when the *novio* comes to take her for an evening walk or drive in which I am dispensed from accompanying them; but the whole place is too *triste* for out-door pleasuring at present; and the fear of cholera seems to depress both. The *duca* indeed is very anxious to be permitted to marry Lila at once, and take her away; and in truth, if not contrary to English etiquette, I cannot see why he should not; but Lila will not hear of it; though I have twice found her in tears after an interview with him. Also, her appetite is after all nothing to be alarmed at. She eats even less than I do, and has to be urged to do that. Perhaps the air of our house is too confined for her; she is certainly paler than she used to be. I pray God she may not be taken ill here. Ah! if it were not

for these measles, and the invaluable help you must be to Madame Beauchamp, how well it would be if you and this dear child could change places; but—*paciencia!* Isabella said to-day it gave her ease even to see that sweet face in her room; and this ought to be sufficient consolation for all my anxieties.

"*Adios*, my dearest sister. Receive the expression of my devotion, and believe me,

"Yours most sincerely affectionate,

"CARMELITA MADRÈRA."

LETTER II.

"*From* LILIAN HARDY *to* MISS HARDY,
Care of MRS. TOMPKINS, *Calle Oribes*,
Buenos Ayres.

"DEAREST LIZ,—What *are* we to do! Don't go on being angry with poor Loo about that unlucky letter, at any rate. You were seedy, and she was in the dumps; and I—well, I suppose I was too impetuous; though that is no excuse for Mrs. Logan writing such nasty letters, and pretending that Max and I were secretly engaged all the time, and only wanted a pretext to get away together. He says I am never to speak to her again; but what does it matter after all! I can't even be sorry I took the journey, since without it I might never have known the best of him. But oh! to think of Loo dislocating her ankle just as you were starting to come back home, and not only having to stay where she is herself, but wanting you to nurse her! I wish the people (who are

they, and how did she get to know them?) would ask me as well; but I suppose that would be too much to expect if the house is small, and the lady has five children.

"I wonder *what* I ought to do, however. Mr. Beauchamp won't hear of my going home by myself. He says people would talk if Max were to come and see me there; and (as I told Max) seeing him would be just the one thing I should have to keep up my spirits till you came; and *of course* he wouldn't keep away. How could he tell from day to day that I hadn't got the cholera! It seems, however, that that horrid little Jones of Gregson and Co.'s house has made up some story already, out of having seen us together the night of our arrival. I don't know what it *can* be, for Max won't tell me, and only gets in a rage, and swears he would have horsewhipped him a fortnight ago if Mr. Beauchamp had not declared it would make matters worse, and bound him over not to do so. I think Mr. Beauchamp is right, and that a little *miserio*, like Mr. Jones, is not worth being chastised by any one so much stronger and above him in every way as Max; but it seems as if his story, whatever it is, must be believed by some people, for except dear Miss Carmelita no one has asked me to come to them; though there must be room enough in the pleasant quintas where many of them are staying; and when I went the other day to call on the Heals, who are usually so polite, Mrs. Heal was barely civil, and the girls did not show at all. I have told Max so much about Monte San Felipian hospitality, that I am quite ashamed that he should see so little show of it towards me in my present strait, and I am sure he does see it, for every day

he keeps urging me to marry him at once, and let him take me away out of this infected town, and to some place where you can join us, and we can all be together.

"Dear Liz, I only tell you this to show you what he is, for of course I won't do it. I won't even listen to it. How could I, when I should *know* that it was out of consideration for me; and that perhaps if he had known me longer and better he might come to think less well of me, and wish he had not been so hasty! Of course he says that is impossible; he has never really loved any woman but me; and every day he knows me makes him love me better; but wouldn't a generous man say that out of mere kindness? And kind and generous as Max is, I couldn't bear to be married unless it was for his good even more than mine. Besides, what would papa say! And then he has never even seen you and Louie! I don't suppose there are any other girls here besides us and the Beauchamps—and *they* are too old—that he would care for; but if I were to marry him, and then he were to see you and find out that he liked you better (and you know, Liz, so many people do; and there is Louie too; she was getting to be very pretty when I last saw her, and at her age every year is an improvement), how dreadful it would be to know that the mistake was made, and could never be unmade! That alone is reason enough for saying 'no', isn't it?—because we should all be miserable then, he and I, and you too. Besides wouldn't you think it horrid of me to marry any one you had never seen, and didn't know? And though, of course, *I* know how good and nice Max is, I sha'n't be quite happy till you know it too, and can tell me that you would be really pleased

to have him for a brother. It is bad enough to feel so nervous about papa, though Mr. Beauchamp says he does not think there is any fear of his objecting to the engagement, as Max is a very good match for me. If that is so, it is an additional argument (with me) against hurrying matters.

"What am I to do now, however? You'll say, 'Stay at the Madrèras';' but I am beginning to fear it was selfish even to come to them. Liz, I don't think any of us have had the least idea how *dreadfully* poor they are; and it goes to my heart to think how we used to joke about the missing kitchen, and their never having any meals at home, when from what I see now, I fear it is desperately hard for them to manage even a daily meal for themselves, let alone for me; and yet I eat as little as I possibly can, and try to make up by buying an occasional tart at the pastry-cook's when I go out. It isn't a healthy mode of living, but—*que faire!* They keep no servant at all, and Miss Carmelita does all the work of the house, though she is so proud that she would rather die than own to it; and instead of letting me help her, as I long to do, keeps me in bed half the morning, and goes to a thousand expedients for getting me out of the way while she cooks and slaves. And yet she urged me to come so warmly that I really thought my doing so would be a kindness to her in Petrona's absence; and I scarcely dare propose to go lest she should guess it is because I have found out the real state of the household.

"The worst of it is, Max doesn't like her at all! You mustn't blame him for that; it is only that he is used to English ladies and English ways; and our foreign habits and

the want of nicety or comfort in the household arrangements shock him at every turn. You would laugh to see how really horrified he is at poor Miss Carmelita's morning *déshabille;* and her way of mounting guard over us, and never leaving the room for a moment when he is in it—well, it is rather trying, even to me; though I shouldn't mind it if it were not *so* aggravating to him. Sometimes I almost wish he would do as Mr. Beauchamp urges, and go back to the camp for a time. Mr. Nicholson has written about a share in some estancia which sounds as if it would be a good thing for him; and at least I should be spared the daily fear of his taking the cholera; but Max laughs at the mere idea of leaving *me* to the risk of it; and I'm afraid he thinks me very selfish not to do as he begs me, and so put an end to the danger and difficulty for both of us. He says if I loved him as he does me, I should not hesitate over little scruples and *convenances;* but indeed it is not want of love. If he knew what each toll of the Cathedral bell is to me, or even the sight of Doña Isabella's face lying back on the pillows, where it has lain for twenty years, ever since *her* lover was brought home dead—he would not doubt me.

"And I am not so good as Doña Isabella. Besides, there is that *other* grave!—It would kill me if anything happened to Max now. Write soon, dear Liz, and advise me. I want comfort badly.

"Yours lovingly,

"LIL."

LETTER III.

"*From* T. C. BEAUCHAMP, Esq., *H. B. M. Consul for Monte San Felipe, To* MISS HARDY, *Buenos Ayres.*

"MY DEAR MISS HARDY,

"I have promised your sister to tell you myself that, in consequence of the news of your father's return being postponed till the autumn, and of your own letter *re* Louie's health, I have withdrawn my opposition to Mr. Lorimer's urgent entreaty to be allowed to marry Lil without waiting for her father's formal consent, and to take her away from the cholera, which is still raging here. I need not say that, as the guardian of all three of you for the time being, I could not under any other circumstances have listened to such a request, or regarded it as aught but the unreasonable impatience of a young man for an event which is seldom less happy for being postponed a reasonable time; but in the present instance I am prepared to agree with Mr. Lorimer, that exceptional situations must be met in an exceptional manner; and that in the case of a cholera-stricken city, and a girl unavoidably deprived of the protection of her family and friends, some of the ordinary formalities attending a marriage may perhaps be omitted. Had Mr. Hardy been returning next month, according to his original intention; or even had her relations with Mrs. Logan not become too strained to admit of her return to Casa Blanca (the leaving of which place I more than ever consider a grave error of judgment), I should have still refused my consent to anything but a provisional engagement, without the sanction of your father's authority; but as in his letters to both you and me, he simply

mentions Russia as his present destination, gives no address, and desires me to consider myself in every way *in loco parentis* towards you all for the next three months; and as you tell me the doctor will not hear of your sister Louie being moved at all for as many weeks, I cannot take on myself the responsibility of refusing my consent, and thereby perhaps of breaking off altogether a match which, viewed externally, is undeniably a good one for Lil. Mr. Lorimer is, I am sure, a perfect gentleman and a man of honour, besides being greatly attached to her; but he is somewhat headstrong and impatient, and greatly inclined to resent the idea of being played with; and I am constrained to admit that the gossip already set about concerning your sister's unfortunate journey to town with him, might be revived in a way to injure her future prospects, were he for any reason to cool in his affection for her, or the engagement to be broken off. Under these circumstances, therefore, though I do not *advise* or uphold this hasty marriage, I will not refuse my consent and countenance to it, provided that you are of the same opinion as to its advisability; and in that case I consider it had better take place from the Consulate, where I shall be very glad to receive you and Lil as my guests. Mrs. Beauchamp will make shift to leave our ailing household for a week, and come up to receive you, and assist with all needful preparations; and of course I will give Lil away myself. She is not looking at all well, and deaths are so numerous and sudden on all sides of us, that I can excuse young Lorimer's anxiety on her account. In haste,

"Your sincere friend,

"T. C. BEAUCHAMP."

LETTER IV.

"*From* MISS HARDY, *The Consulate, Monte San Felipe,*
To MISS LOUISA HARDY, *Buenos Ayres.*

"DEAREST LOO,—You might have waited for all descriptions till you saw me; for by the time you get this it will be all over, and we shall be on our way to join you. *No*, I don't like him at all! He is exquisitely handsome, perfectly dressed, and (I suppose) very much in love with Lil; but I don't envy her, poor girl; for of all exacting, jealous, domineering lovers—but there! *she* likes him, and you know it is Lil's way to make an idol of anything she likes, and sit at its feet contentedly. I only hope this one will not fall on and crush her some day! At present he is content to take possession of her, as if she were a baby with no mind or will of her own, and to assume to know her feelings, wishes, and character a great deal better than I or any one else! The method is a simple one—he gauges them by his own, and pronounces accordingly! This is between you and me, however, for both the Beauchamps admire him excessively, and *she* evidently considers him quite thrown away on our Lil. Ah, well, opinions differ!

"We have just been trying on the wedding-dress in preparation for to-morrow; and I must say she does look lovely in it, simple as it is. Don't fret, you poor little thing, at not being there. It will be a horribly *triste* affair; no guests but Miss Carmelita, and Lil certain to break down and cry. She is suspiciously hysterical and red-eyed to-day. Good-bye, dear,

Yours lovingly,

"LIZ.

"P.S.—I have found out the secret of the red eyes. Fancy her slipping off all by herself, and in this cholera time too, to the English cemetery, to put some flowers on young Melville's grave!! I did hope she had forgotten all that affair; but don't mention it. She begged me not to do so."

BOOK FOUR.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAIL FROM ENGLAND.

"Shall I busk me as a bride,
I so bonny;
For you to wed me with a ring,
Oh! boy Johnny?"

Christina Rossetti.

"And for that nothing of here olde gere
She shulde bring into his hous, he bad.
Fro foot to hed they clothed han all neu."

Chaucer (*'The Clerkes Tale'*).

"GOOD HEAVENS! This is news indeed! *He!* Why, who could have thought——Lil, come here please, I want to tell you something."

Lil had been just a fortnight married, and she and Max and the two Hardy girls were at present occupying a suite of rooms in one of the principal hotels in Buenos Ayres. For the first week after their wedding they had gone to a quinta, placed at their disposal by a hospitable Argentino, who happened to hear of the young people's romantic marriage

from Max's friend, the Vice-Consul; but when Mr. Lorimer found that he was not to be allowed to pay anything for this accommodation, as also that within doors mosquitoes, centipedes, and other "small kine" were as plentiful as roses and orange-flowers without, his English sensitiveness took alarm in two ways, and he elected to return to the more prosaic comforts of town and hotel life.

Lil was sorry at first. She was very much in love, and very happy; and her happiness was still too new for her not to feel a half-delicious, wholly maidenly shyness from the very consciousness of it, which made her so adorable that Max felt more in love with her than he had ever done before. Notwithstanding the mosquitoes, therefore (which *du reste* did not bite *her*, preferring—as they generally do—newly-imported blood), each day in that little orange-bowered quinta, with the purple river flowing at its feet, and deep red roses shedding musky odours on the wedded pair who wandered arm-in-arm among them, seemed to her like one stolen from heaven; and her eyes were thick with tears as she turned in the carriage to look her last upon it, and murmur:

"Good-bye, dear little paradise! Oh, Max, it has been our *first home together*. Shall we ever be so happy in another?"

Yet it was she, after all, who found one consolation in the move, which somehow returned no echo from her husband's

bosom. That brief meeting and speedy parting with the sisters from whom she had been so long separated, had not taken place without a tug at Lil's heart-strings, which not even her overflowing happiness could deaden; but rather intensified, by adding to it a sharp sting of remorse. For she was not leaving them *this* time at any one's will but her own; not for punishment, but pleasure, the pleasure of getting married, which is one of which women think too highly to allow of it as befitting the second girl of a family, until the elder has at least been first suited or sued; or without permission solemnly given by all the parties concerned; but Lil had stolen her permission without waiting for it to be given at all, or concern for Lisbeth's prior rights and pleasure in the matter. "Liz has so many lovers, though," she said to herself in excuse, "and they are all of the same sort, while my Max is so different, so —*English*. Even if he had not chosen me first, I don't think they would have suited one another," which was true; for Max, in his inmost soul, liked Liz as little as she liked him; though I am bound to say that what she hid from love for her sister, he did from simple good-breeding and gentlemanliness.

Lil might, therefore, have absolved herself on this score, if her sensitive conscience had not found something else

to prick it, in the fact that she had flatly disobeyed her father, and run away from the home he had provided for her, on the plea that she could not bear to be absent from her sisters any longer; and then, as soon as she was safe back and within reach of them, had given herself away to some one else, and separated herself from them by a barrier which was no sooner made than she knew it to be more potent than leagues of camp or river; and of which this very honeymoon on which she had so cheerfully departed seemed an example. Louie, indeed, with that sharp tongue of hers, had pointed out this inconsistency to her, by sobbing out, as they clung to one another in a deluge of farewell tears:

"You *pretended* you wanted to come back to us, and now you're going off with him because you liked him the best all the time; and it's awfully mean, and—and I sha'n't like him a bit; and we shall never be jolly again, we three together, as we used to be"—all of which led to Lil's exclaiming in a cheerful tone on the evening when Max told her he had decided on returning to town:

"Ah, well, if we must leave this dear place, we shall at least go back to Liz and Loo all the sooner. We must send for them the minute we reach Buenos Ayres, eh, *querido?* How glad they will be!"

Max started very perceptibly. True, it was he himself

who had determined on not being "beholden" to the unknown don's hospitality any longer, and had written to his friend Denman to say so before even consulting Lil; but he had not expected to find her consoling herself in this manner; and somehow the pretty white hands with which he was playing, as he lounged on a heap of cushions at his wife's feet, seemed to lose their charm for him, and he dropped them sharply, as he asked:

"Have you been regretting them then all the time that we have been here?"

Lil hesitated; not from fear of vexing him, for his head being turned away, she could not see his face; but so as to answer more truthfully. Her reply, when it did come, was scarcely so much directed to him as to the conscience pricks before alluded to.

"Not *all* the time, I'm afraid; but indeed I have thought of them a great deal, and—and wished for them too."

Max felt so deeply offended that he took his head off the knees against which it had been resting, and sprang to his feet.

"Indeed!" he said cuttingly, "I am sorry you did not tell me sooner. It isn't usual, I believe, for a wife in the first week of her honeymoon to want a host of other people

beside her husband to amuse her; but of course if I had known my company bored you so much——"

Lil interrupted him eagerly.

"Max! you *know* it doesn't. Oh! how can you say that when I have been so happy—happier than I ever was in all my life before!"

"So happy that you have been longing for your sisters nearly all the time—seven days it is—that I have kept you away from them!" said Max sardonically. He really did feel that he had a right to be indignant, and perhaps most men would have agreed with him. Lil's eyes moistened.

"Why, Max, that was the very reason! It seemed so selfish to be happy—as *perfectly* happy as I was—without them; and you know they have not got any one like you to console them;" and the young wife got up and came close to her husband, bringing her soft cheek against his shoulder in a way very irresistible to most male humanities. Max, however, was not quite appeased; he did not withdraw his shoulder, but he would not turn round, and asked rather bitterly:

"I wonder how much more you love your sisters than you do me, Lil?"

Lil gave a soft little laugh.

"How much more? Why, twenty-one years all but three weeks, of course. And how much *less?* All my life to come!

Oh, Max!" becoming suddenly serious, "I hope it will be a long life for both of us, we are so young, and we ought to be so happy! Dear, I can't help it, I must love you most now; and that's what makes me feel so mean and horrid towards the girls, for they care for *me* just the same. Yet I don't think I do love them less in reality; it is only that it is . . . something different,' and by this time Max was softened, and had taken her in his arms, where he was exerting a husband's rights over the fair red lips and frank eyes and white, silky throat.

"I should think it *was* 'something different'," he said, laughing. "Lil, darling, you are a dear, tender-hearted innocent; and I was a jealous fool. Who should a girl like you care for if not her own sisters? And I know you do love me best. But say it again, sweetheart, and as sweetly as you did just now; so—with your arms round my neck. Lil, how often I longed to hear it from you in those days at the estancia!"

So the first slight misunderstanding in their wedded life came to an end in blissful kisses and pretty words; and so much ashamed was Max of having made it and actually brought tears into his wife's eyes, that when next morning she asked him a little timidly what she should do about writing to the girls, he answered with extra cordiality:

"Why, write and ask them to take rooms for us and themselves at the 'Internacional'. Tell 'Lisbeth it will be a favour to *me* if she will, for she knows better than any one else what you would like. By the way, I have still to make acquaintance with your younger sister; the brief vision I had in our passage through Buenos Ayres chiefly recalls her to me as a heap of white flounces, a fringe, and tears."

"Poor dear Loo! It was hard on her not to have been at our wedding, and then only to get that glimpse of me in passing," said Lil apologetically. "But I do want you to know her, Max, for I am sure you will be friends; she is so witty and clever; a great deal cleverer than I am."

"Are you trying to pretend that I shall like her a great deal better, you not-at-all-clever person?" said Max, glad to take refuge in fondness from any confirmation of Lil's assurances. But he was determined to behave well as a brother-in-law; and even when they got to the hotel, where the Miss Hardys were found awaiting them, he forbore to spoil Lil's pleasure in the reunion by any hint that in the first days of married life two are company and three—or even four—are none. Other people looked on the arrangement as a most natural and proper thing. Here were the Hardy girls (one with a dislocated ankle, too!) kept out of their own home, and obliged to become a burden on mere

acquaintances, in consequence of the cholera epidemic in Monte San Felipe; and here was Lil not only married, but married with a haste and absence of formality which only a desire to assume protection of her sisters could excuse. What more natural, then, that she and her husband should do so? Even Max got no "*kudos*" for any extraordinary amiability in the course, and his sisters-in-law seemed to take it so completely as a matter of course that he almost felt constrained to look on it in the same light, and only felt glad that the sum he had a few weeks back asked Mr. Denman to lend him, on the strength of his friend Lord Erlscourt's name, was large enough to cover the not inconsiderable expense of maintaining three lovely young ladies at a fashionable and expensive hotel.

Whatever other faults Max may have had, meanness in money matters was not one of them. A lofty scorn indeed of small economies, and a tendency to lavishness both with regard to himself and other people, were the chief causes of the difficulties which had already overtaken him; and unfortunately, Lil was the very last person to be of any assistance to him in this respect, seeing that she had never been consulted in money matters at home, and, until her visit to the camp, had never in her life possessed more than an odd half-dollar of her own. Mr. Hardy never refused his

daughters money; but he gave them no allowance, and was in the habit of requiring a specification of each separate need before handing them the money for it, a custom which was certainly calculated to put anything like girlish extravagances out of the question. The girls themselves, however, did not know whether he acted in this way from simple parsimony or poverty, seeing that he never dreamt of admitting them to any confidence on the subject of his pecuniary affairs; and they had only a general idea that they were not as well off as the other English residents in Monte San Felipe, an inferiority which, however, had something *distingué* in it to a pleasant imagination, as implying that they were not of the shop, shoppy, "even as those publicans". After all, they had always had enough to eat and drink and clothe themselves, and therefore this suggested poverty did not weigh upon them to any greater degree than that of leaving unsatisfied those natural, girlish longings for "pretty things" which the two younger ones possessed in a remarkable degree, and therefore of stimulating their bright wits and clever fingers to supply deficiencies in a manner which, to outsiders, often suggested rather free expenditure.

In this way Lil knew little more of money matters, and the relative value of incomes, than a five-year-old child, and enjoyed the pleasure of spending and being spent on nearly

as much. She had been given to understand that Max would have £800 a year when he married (a sum which, roughly translated into $4000, sounded like considerable wealth to her), and more than double as much in the future; and as she did not comprehend that even the first-named amount would not be actually his for another two months, and had been already forestalled to some extent by his previous extravagances, she looked on him in the light of a rich man; and was as innocently delighted to receive as he was to bestow the costly presents and dainty luxuries which he could not refrain from lavishing on her.

In truth, he was far more in love as a bridegroom than as a wooer, and for the reason that the very qualities in her which had won his love—those external ones of beauty, grace, and personal fascination—had never made themselves more deliciously apparent than at the present moment. If Lil had looked beautiful to him in the flapping sun-bonnets and simple cotton gowns which she generally wore in the camp, how was it possible that she should not shine forth in still more exquisite loveliness when set off by flowing cambrics and sheeny silks?—and how could a young husband with an unusually correct eye for feminine beauty and adornments, resist the temptation to disprove that stupid old saying about "beauty unadorned adorned the most" by draping the

graceful head in mantillas of filmy lace, or hanging jewels in the tiny ears, sure always of a shower of delighted kisses from his graceful wife, and undeterred by any more severe remonstrances than,

"Oh, Max, how *lovely!* How good you are to me! I never had such beautiful things in all my life before. Aren't you *very* extravagant?"

On the whole, it was perhaps well that negotiations for a share of an estancia already in good management were in progress; and also that, with the perversity attending natural events, the cholera, which had brought about all these unauthorised proceedings, and driven Max and Lil into matrimony, had no sooner effected that purpose than it began to fall off so rapidly that almost every day's bulletin diminished the number of its victims by half, and made it probable that in another week or so it would be quite safe for Liz and Loo to return to their own home.

They were in no particular hurry to do so. Lil was what Loo called "refreshingly free from married woman bumptiousness", and Max had showed himself, so far, as such an agreeable brother-in-law, that, in remorse for their previous harsh judgment of him, they rewarded him not only by dropping all constraint in his presence, but by combining to pet and wait on him in a way which, coming from two

uncommonly pretty girls, was sufficiently flattering to a young man under five-and-twenty, to make him far more tolerant of their intrusion on his honeymoon, and the mode of speaking and thinking which had displeased him so much in their letters, than he could have imagined possible.

It was a very pleasant state of things altogether; and, to add to it, there were no croaking voices here as there had been in Monte San Felipe, spoiling the young couple's happiness by their jarring notes. Max had written both to his own family and Lil's father on the subject of his marriage, and Lil had of course done the same to the latter; but as, on the shortest computation, more than two months must elapse before any answer could be received to these communications, they both felt that there was no need for anxiety or unhappiness, for the present at all events; and Max had, besides, the comfortable remembrance that by the time the letters arrived he would have attained his majority, and be free to dispense with his step-father's approbation on this or any other line of his conduct.

To be sure, he had received a very strong letter of remonstrance from his friend Denman when the latter heard that he was thinking of marrying at all in his present circumstances; but when the Vice-Consul saw Lil he was fain to own that the imprudent young man had at least a very fair excuse for

his madness; and being himself only a recent importation from the F. O., a thoroughly good-natured fellow, and a great friend of Lorimer's quasi pupil and present ally, Lord Erlscourt, he was rather inclined to lionise the handsome young couple than the reverse; sent people to call on them; gave a grand ball in their honour; and even insisted on putting his own carriage at Lil's disposal, so that Max could drive her and her sisters about whenever they felt disposed.

On the afternoon wherewith this chapter opens, they were all at home; for the English mail had come in earlier in the day, and Liz (with an amiability which greatly recommended itself to her brother-in-law) having just returned from an expedition to the Consulate for their joint papers and letters, they were now enjoying them: Louie lying at full length on her invalid couch, while Liz, seated on the head of it, held open the 'Graphic' for their mutual inspection; and Lil standing by a little basket-table in the window, heaped with flowers just sent her by one of their new acquaintances, her slender figure robed in a flowing gown of pale blue cambric, trimmed with manifold rufflings of coffee-coloured lace, her rounded, ivory-tinted arms glittering with half a score of slender silver bangles, her wonderful hair hanging in a shining, rippling mass about her waist just as she had rushed in from

the adjoining bed-room at the news that there was a letter for her from Mr. Beauchamp with one from her father in it.

She looked so lovely at the moment, standing there in all her fresh, girlish beauty, to which a certain touch of wifely richness and dignity seemed already superadded, that though Max had a whole pile of letters awaiting his own perusal, he could not forbear coming over to her first, and lifting the bright locks from her face to whisper:

"Lil, you are not to look so anxious over that. Don't you know that ten hundred fathers could not take you from me now, my beauty?"

Lil looked up, colouring brightly.

"I am not afraid, Max. I don't think papa would want to do so. He does not know as yet; but——Oh! what a huge black border you have got there! Is it any bad news?"

Max glanced quickly at the budget in his hand, to which her gaze had pointed.

"That? Why—what the deuce! It's from my sister," he ejaculated, flinging the other letters down, and tearing open the one alluded to. A momentary silence followed while he ran his eyes over the contents; and then the exclamation recorded at the beginning of the chapter, and which made both the other girls lift their heads expectantly; but it was not till Lil had followed him into the bed-room

and shut the door that he gave her an explanation, taking her in his arms and kissing her as he saw how frightened she looked.

"My darling, it's not *bad* news—for you. No, nor for me either, though of course I can't help being shocked after having known the old fellow so long, and grown up with him. And then my mother loved him, and Alice—it would be caddish to abuse him now, ill as he treated me. Lil, my step-father is dead : died suddenly a month ago, and we must start for England by the very next steamer. My sister wants me at home as soon as possible."

END OF VOL. II.